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THESIS

AN AESTHETIC STUDY OF NINE PLAYS OF AESCHYLUS AND SOPHOCLES

ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of the thesis is to defend the belief that Aeschylus and Sophocles are to be counted among the few great poets of all time. But some "classicists" have gone so far as to say that Aeschylus is "une manière de fou", and some "romanticists" accuse Sophocles of being "the one poet who is classical in the vulgar sense." One suspects that such views are partisan in the extreme. It would seem high time that some one should defend the great poets from such attacks by attempting a synthesis of the classical and romantic theories of aesthetic and literary criticism.

Historically the pendulum of art criticism is set swinging by Plato who, in spite of some puzzling pronouncements, yet favours a theory of "inspiration," and by Aristotle who in the *Poetics* gives the appearance of reducing all to "rules." This divergence reached its peak in the pseudo-classicism and romanticism of the last three centuries. The original problem remains—just what are the place and the meaning of poetic inspiration?

An analysis of romanticism and classicism yields the following definitions: romanticism is that way of thinking which in poetry and philosophy gives first place to intuitions, immediate experiences; classicism that attitude of mind which is primarily interested in the quest of wisdom. The inspiration of a great poet, in whom these two desires are fused, is defined as *intuitus sapientiae*. *Sapientia* is to be thought an intellectual *habitus* of which the *intuitus* is the particular actuation. Beauty, the object of such insight, is defined as *pax formae*.

The question arises whether poetic inspiration, so defined, is different from the insight of a philosopher. It is a poet *qua* poet is interested in *sapientia* (*cupida scientia*, according to St. Thomas's etymology); a philosopher is often content with *scientia*. Thus Plato may more truly be called a poet than a philosopher. Or, if one prefer, the vision of the true philosopher and of the great poet is one.

From earliest times the miracle of communication of such a vision captivated the attention of mankind no less than the greater miracle of vision itself. So true is this that a study of pseudo-classicism and romanticism shows that the

external expression came to be confounded by both schools with the vision. Thus the pseudo-classicists derived all the poet's power from rules or even from crass associationism. The romanticists derived all from imagery and associationism of images. In this they were misled by their failure to understand Coleridge's use of the word "imagination."

The real function of the imagination is to clothe the author's vision with that fair semblance which will arouse in the reader a similar vision. Theoretically, at least, we distinguish the poet's intellectual vision from its imaginative embodiment. So Francis Thompson describes three steps in the poetic process, the ideal, the mental image of the ideal, and the external expression. This distinction is confirmed by the fact that the greatest poets can at times dispense with all imagery and ornament, and by "le nude parole" cause their vision to leap like "a flame kindled into the mind of the hearer."

We take, then, a critical position midway between extreme "leftist" theories of physical associationism, such as that of I. A. Richards, and extreme "rightist" theories, such as that of Croce.

We believe that the universal acceptance of great poetry argues unmistakably to a communication of the poet's vision: the appeal of the greatest poets must be based on the only thing which is unchangeable in man, the intellectual perception of truth. The emotional elements we account for by the intuitional character of the poet's vision and its accompanying delight. Thus in the Beatific Vision, of which all art is a promise, the romanticist's desires are stilled by the immediacy of the vision, and the classicist's by a participation in infinite wisdom.

Primary criticism of a poem consists of two judgments. First: we allow the poem, on an uncritical first hearing, to work its will on us; we then decide whether its effect is such as would proceed from an intuitional vision. Second: we judge the content of our experience in the light of wisdom.

That is to say, we judge whether the poet's vision was an *intuitus sapientiae*. Ibsen, for example, in *Ghosts* passes the first test but not the second.

The literary critic is in the same position as a theologian who, having felt the unction and fervour of a spiritual treatise, decides it is the sort of thing a true mystic might write, and then proceeds to a study of the work in the light of dogmatic truth.

Great poetry, which alone we are considering, is not limited from without by rules and precepts, neither is it a free effusion of lyricism; but it is limited by the wisdom of the poet, and is bright with the joy of immediate insight.

If we are right in thinking that those who criticise Aeschylus and Sophocles unfavourably are misled by partisan instincts, the basic reason for their opinion is now evident. The critics of Sophocles are those who fail to distinguish between intellect and reason (which last St. Thomas declares to have its rise in *umbra intelligentiae*). Hence they believe *a priori* that wisdom as they understand it is incapable of such brilliant focus as untutored genius. Similarly the critics of Aeschylus believe that lyric fervour either unseats the reason or at least is to be found nowhere but in a primitive or retrograde state of culture. In accordance with the critic's own preference for the classic or romantic attitude of mind, one poet or the other is rejected.

But if we believe that great poetry fuses the two seemingly disparate views of life, it becomes clear upon comparison of the plays that Aeschylus and Sophocles have achieved such poetry. We see that the character of Ajax and Antigone, the ideal of a hero's death in the light of day, the sublime appeal to the eternal laws, the awful doom of Oedipus, and the picture of his last moments "amid the portents of the sky," are no less compelling than the lyric fervour of the *Promethea*, *Septem*, and *Orestea*. The tragedies of both poets are "difficult or rather impossible to withstand, and the memory of them is strong and hard to efface." On the other hand, the wisdom of the *Orestea* (and so far as we can judge, that of the *Promethea* and the *Septem*) a wisdom which reaches from end to end mightily and disposes all things sweetly, which justifies the ways of God to man, offers as incisive a solution of the problem of evil as is to be found in Sophocles.

We recognize in both poets the joy of an immediate intuition as well as that deep knowledge of the world and man, that quiet delight in the order and belief in the purpose of things, that we have seen to be the prerogative of wisdom. If the reader agree with this judgment, then we may consider that our original statement is justified: "the greatest poetry is a fusion of romantic intuition and classical love of wisdom, and in the greatest plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles we have such a fusion."

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- Plato—Professor G. M. A. Grube.
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AN
AESTHETIC STUDY
OF NINE PLAYS
OF AESCHYLUS AND SOPHOCLES.

Part 1

A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF TORONTO UNIVERSITY

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FOREWORD.

The primary purpose of the present thesis is to defend the belief that Aeschylus and Sophocles are to be counted among the few truly great poets of all time. This opinion is not by any means universal: as we shall see, there have been in the course of literary criticism not a few authors who have denied true greatness to one poet or the other. Now questions of taste, as has been said, are not capable of discussion. Those writers who simply dislike one or other of the tragedians are not to be expected to change their views because of anything I may say. But most critics of Greek Tragedy base their judgments on more or less explicit principles of criticism, principles which arise out of the supposed antinomy between classicism and romanticism. When a man deals with principles he is presumably open to conviction. Therefore I have prefaced my discussion of the plays themselves with a consideration of some of the major problems of aesthetics and literary criticism.

The theory of aesthetics which I here present is founded on the belief, to use Hegelian terminology,

that the thesis of classicism and the antithesis of romanticism must eventually be united in a synthesis. This belief I shall attempt to justify theoretically in the first half of the thesis by showing that the best elements of the classical and romantic traditions should be found united in the greatest poetry. In the second half of the thesis I shall try to show that Aeschylus and Sophocles do in fact exemplify in their poetry a fusion of romantic intuition and classical love of wisdom. The two sections of my thesis are thus mutually dependent. Any reader who is convinced of the aesthetic and critical principles which I propose will, I believe, be willing to accept my evaluation of the plays: any reader who agrees with my criticism of the plays will concede that my principles are essentially vindicated. Hence either part of the thesis may be considered as a proof of my cardinal conviction that the greatest poetry is a fusion of romantic intuition and classical love of truth and that in the greatest works of Aeschylus and Sophocles we have such a fusion.

Well aware of the difficulty and novelty of my argument, I have decided that not all the plays will suit my purpose. For, first of all, only the greatest poetry can meet the requirements of the theory of aesthetics here proposed. But not even the greatest poets are always at their best. And I might as well state frankly that at least three of the plays which I have omitted, the *Supplikes*, *Trachinians*, and *Philoctetes*, do not in my opinion present Aeschylus and Sophocles at their greatest. The *Electra* and *Persae*, however, would have been included had I treated the plays separately. But on proceeding to the actual work of criticism I saw at once that the most difficult part of my task would be to persuade the reader that Sophocles is not lacking in that intuitive romantic power which belongs to Aeschylus, and, conversely that Aeschylus no less than Sophocles is possessed of the classicist's wise and calm outlook on reality. This, however, I believed could be done only by a comparative study of the tragedies. Thus I thought it possible to demonstrate, for example, that the vision of the *Antistone*

is no less intuitive than that of the Septem, and that the Oresteia no less than the Oedipus plays is a full and noble expression of the marvellous ways of God with the wonderful being that is man.

For such a comparative treatment the natural grouping is that which I have actually adopted, the Ajax and Prometheus, the Antigone and Septem, the Oresteia and the two tragedies of Oedipus. Of the remaining plays four, the Supplikes, Persae, Trachinians, and Philoctetes, are so disparate in concept and design as to be unsuitable for my purpose. The Philoctetes and Persae in particular, though most worthy of study, offer the critic little ground for comparison: the Persae is a majestic tour de force based on a great national victory; the Philoctetes a subtle character study, almost one might say, a composition in a minor key.

The Electra I am still loathe to omit. But its introduction would be awkward because the Choephoroi is already included as part of the Trilogy. Besides it is enough for the present that we centre our

attention on Aeschylus and Sophocles, but the inclusion of the Electra would demand a study of the Electra of Euripides. Such a study (or even the omission of it!) would endanger the whole thesis since it would call to the mind of most readers bitter romantic or classical prejudices. But, as will be seen, the first requisite of my theory of criticism is a fair reading of the play, something no longer possible as regards the Electras. I have therefore thought it wise to omit the Electra and thus avoid the scenes of old conflicts.

For a similar reason I have decided to study the plays chiefly as dramatic poems rather than as dramas. For if we consider Aeschylus and Sophocles with our attention focused on their dramatic technique we are at once involved in the age-old dispute as to the critical worth of Aristotle's Poetics. Let it not be thought, however, that I am striving to avoid all controversy. Quite the contrary. It is my contention that an exaggerated interest in the Poetics has led to the neglect of an equally pregnant treatise, that of "Longinus" On the Sublime.

Such a view should afford ample scope for difference of opinion. But it is high time to my way of thinking that the dramatic poetry of Aeschylus and Sophocles should once more be studied as poetry. As Mackail says of Sophocles, in a passage that I shall quote again:

"In writing about Sophocles, critics are perpetually evading the point, or it might be more accurate to say that the point is perpetually evading them. They slide off into discussions of his verbal technique, the remarkable way in which he brings the vocabulary and structure of his poetry close alongside of prose; or of his stage-craft, the adroit mechanism of his drama; or still often-er, of his ethics and theology. But these are not his poetry; and it is by no means easy to keep the eye steady on the poetry."

This, it seems to me, is quite true of most critics who have studied the two tragedians. It is, of course, only natural that the study of Greek Tragedy should have taken its departure from the Poetics of Aristotle, and that the critics should have been interested in the masters of tragedy as masters of tragedy. It is true, too, that many critics whose chief interest lay in the dramatic technique have yet given us some beautiful pages of poetic criticism. Thus Professors Owen and Norwood, to both of whom I

am greatly indebted, show, the one a masterful appreciation of Aeschylus' essential vision, the other an unfailing nicety of discrimination in matters pertaining to Sophocles' poetical technique and "unearthly eloquence."

But explicit criticism of the poetry of Aeschylus and Sophocles is all too rare. And though the distinction between the poetry and the dramatic art of the Greek Tragedians is not always clear, nor, as we shall see, always valid, still I think it good that an attempt should be made to give the study of their poetry the first place, not only because their dramatic art has already been exhaustively studied, but also because it is to be hoped that what they have to teach us as poets will prove no less important than what they have already taught us as tragedians.



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PART I.

THE THEORY.

CHAPTER I.

From the very earliest times the poets have been called seers and have been credited with a special insight into the truth and beauty of the universe. (1) It has ever been impossible for a man of refined taste and culture to approach a great poem without feeling that he is treading on sacred ground, without stooping to loose the latchet of his shoes in the presence of the divine fire: ἔνθεον ἥρπ' ἡ ποίησις. (2) It is significant that the first great poet of the "ancient morn" should have begun his lay with the invocation
 μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Διὶ
 , significant that in the evening of his life he should still sing ἄνδρα μοι
 ἕννεπε, μοῖνα μούσῃσιν.

The Greeks, after the time of Homer, were all but unanimous in viewing poetry as a mystery and a visitation. In spite of what has been called the "rationalizing tendency" of the Greek mind, in spite of the seeming preference of the very Athenians for

(1) cf. Homer, Odyssey, VIII, 477 ff.
 cf. Pindar, Fr. 118.

(2) Aristotle, Rhetoric, 1408b.



warriors and statesmen before poets, (3) in spite of the long Greek tradition of assimilating poetry to τέχνη or to σοφία in its technical sense, (4) the popular conception of the poet as an

-
- (3) In Democratic Athens the profession of a poet was hardly surrounded by an aureola of glory. Sophocles and Aeschylus, we might almost believe, were ordinary citizens who wrote poetry, as it were, in their "spare time." The omission in Aeschylus' epitaph of any mention of his poetry has often been noted in this regard. But Pohlenz, it seems to me, goes altogether too far when he concludes from this epitaph (*italics mine*): "des andern (Aeschylus) ganze Dichtung ist durchdrungen von dem Bürgersinn, dem es ebenso selbstverständlich ist, sein Leben für das Vaterland dahinzugeben wie sein höchstes geistiges Können im Dienste des Ganzen zu entfalten." Die Griechische Tragödie, Leipzig, B.G. Teubner, 1930 pp. 24-25.

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- (4) cf. (Theodorus Bergk, Poetae Lyrici Graeci Lipsiae, B.G. Teubner, 3 vols., 1878, 1882, 1882.

Bacchylides, Fr. 14. (v. III p. 574)

ἕτερος ἐξ ἑτέρου σοφὸς τὸ τε πάλλαι τὸ τε νέων
οὐδὲ γὰρ ῥᾷστος ἀρρήτων ἐπέων πύλας
ἐξευρεῖν.

Pindar, Ol., IX, 11. 107-108 (v.I, p.114)

σοφία μὲν ἀλλεῖνός.

Pindar, Pyth., VI, 1. 49 (v.I, p. 206)

σοφίαν δ' ἐν κοχότητι Πιερίδων

Sappho, Fr. 69 (v.III, p. 112)

οὐδ' ἴαν δοκίμοιμι προσίδοιραν φάος ἄλλῃ
ἔσσεσθαι σοφίαν πάρευνον εἰς οὐδένα πω χρόνον
τοιμαύτην

(cf. C.R. Haines, Sappho The Poems and Fragments, London, George Routledge & Sons, 1926, p. 101)



inspired madman persisted down to Plato's time and later. (5) Pindar, who exalts to the utmost the claims of art, does not hesitate to subordinate those claims to natural genius and divine inspiration. (6) Democritus speaks out in no uncertain terms in favour of a theory of direct revelation. (7) Socrates tells us in the *Apology* that men write poetry "not by wisdom but by a sort of genius and inspiration." (8) Finally, Timotheus and the other

- (5) Thus S.H. Butcher, Harvard Lectures on the Originality of Greece, London, Macmillan, 1920, p. 143: "The popular conception of the poet as an inspired madman, destitute of art, who can compose nothing so long as he is in his senses leads Plato to a slighting appreciation of the poetic gift." cf. e.g. Plato Laws, IV, 719c.
cf. "Longinus," On the Sublime, VIII, 4.
- (6) cf. Pindar, Ol. IX, 11. 100 ff. (Ibid.)
 τὸ δὲ φῶς κρείσσειον ἅπαν πολλοὶ δὲ δεκταῖς
 ἔνθ' ὁρῶντων ἄρεσιν κλέος
 ὥρουσαν ἀρέσθαι
 ἄνευ δὲ θεοῦ σεσημαμένον
 οὐ σκαδιότερον χρῆμα' ἕκαστον
- (7) Apud Clem. Strom., VI, 827 p. (quoted by Butcher, Ibid.) p. 138
 ποιητῆς δὲ ἄρσα μὲν ἄν
 ἡράφης μετ' ἐν θουσιασμοῦ
 καὶ ἱεροῦ πνεύματος, καλὰ
 κάρτα ἐστίν.
- (8) Apology, 22a



dithyrambic poets seem to have fulfilled literally the persistent popular notion of a poet as one who is *μῆτις ἰκτός*. ((9)

Such, in briefest outline, was the state of poetical theory in Greece when Plato began to write his dialogues. Little wonder that he fought shy of poetry even in its saner manifestations. Little wonder that he was afraid of this quick-silver stream that eludes the grasp of reason, that but touches us and passes on leaving a sense of coolness and of power. The problem of poetry was very soon to become desperate for every lover of reason in fourth century Athens. Plato, as a lover of reason, tried to stem the tide; time and again he lashed out against this "imitation of an imitation." Yet the very panic of his fear was a supreme compliment to inspired poetry. In spite of his misgivings, he looked upon poetry as a sort of awful unpredictable wisdom, a visitation that he knew well in himself; the kinship between poetic and philosophic knowledge did not escape him:

(9) Thus Maurice Croiset, Histoire de la Littérature Grecque, Paris, Fontemoing, 1913, v.III, p. 668: "On dit communément dans Athènes, pour désigner un imbécile 'plus bête qu'un dithyrambe.'"



"Beauty, the effluence of fair works,
shall flow into the eye and ear like a
health-giving breeze from a purer region,
and insensibly draw the soul from earli-
est years into likeness and sympathy with
the beauty of reason." (10)

But for all that, it is, of course, true that Plato
barred the poets from his ideal state. Nor is it a
point in favour of his theory of poetry that his ideal
poet has never been realized except in Dante. In all
fairness though, we should remember that his description
of an ideal statesman has never been realized at all.
The plain fact is that in Plato the conflict between
the inspiration of poetry and the claims of reason was
never resolved; he remains to the last a soul "Torn be-
tween the love, the fear, and the shame of poetry." (11)

It is probable that in fighting the battle of
reason Plato was fighting a lost fight against his
own soul. Once, at least, in the Phaedrus we find him

(10) Republic, 401 b. On this passage cf.
G.M.A. Grube, Plato's Thought, London,
Methuen, 1936, p. 183: "That is Plato's
fundamental position, a general principle
with which, in the last analysis, even the
purest exponent of art for art's sake will
hesitate to disagree. And it is upon this
solid basis that we must examine his re-
marks and criticisms throughout...."

(11) Henri Bremond, Prière et Poésie, Paris,
Bernard Grasset, 1926, p. 6: "Ainsi Platon
se trouve-t-il divisé entre l'amour la
peur et la honte de la poésie."



swept along into the regions of ecstasy; and there the popular concept of madness is sublimated into an inspiration that is infinitely nobler and higher. We may believe that, in the last analysis, there was still a place in Plato's philosophy of life for inspired poetry. Somewhere from his other world of ideas there shone for the poet's eyes a vision of that

"beauty which is absolute, simple, and everlasting, which, without diminution and without increase or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and ever-perishing beauties of all other things."
(12)

Much more could be said about Plato; we shall, indeed, return to him again. But for the present it is enough to have seen that in Plato the conflict between poetic inspiration and reason really begins, and that, in the end, he leaves us with only one possible solution, a defense of inspiration in the way he defends it in the Phaedrus. Aristotle was soon to offer another "defense" of poetry.

(12) Phaedrus, 247e.

But would that Aristotle's defense had been as kind as Plato's "prosecution." There were those at Athens, Gorgias and the rest, who had tried to assimilate poetry to rhetoric. (13) There was besides, as we have seen, a long Greek tradition of artistic technique, vastly important to a people that from childish beginnings had won its way to a wonderfully mature perfection in painting, architecture, and sculpture. There was, moreover, Aristotle's own love of precision and systematizing. All these influences led him, consciously or unconsciously, to neglect the inspirational theory of poetry in his Poetics. (14) He himself never intended to deny inspiration. But many have been misled into the belief that his portentous silence was tantamount

(13) cf. E.E. Sikes, The Greek View of Poetry, London, Methuen, 1931, pp. 30 ff.

(14) cf. J.H. Cardinal Newman, Essays Critical and Historical, London, Longmans Green, 1919 (new impression), v. I, essay 1, "Poetry with Reference to Aristotle's Poetics," sec. 3, beginning: "Aristotle, then, it must be allowed, treats dramatic composition more as an exhibition of ingenious workmanship, than as a free and unfettered effusion of genius."



to a denial.

Thus we have in the mystical language of the Phaedrus and the silence of the Poetics the beginnings of that conflict between neo-classical and romantic theories of poetry which has lasted down to our own day. (15)

It is therefore unfortunate that two of the lost works of antiquity should have been Aristotle "On the Poets," (16) and the work of the great Platonist Augustine "De Pulchro

(15) The ideas and even the vocabulary of the Greeks, especially of Plato, in aesthetics, as in so many fields of thought, have persisted down to our time. To take a random example: (aesthetics) ist also zunächst eine METAPHYSIK des SCHÖNEN indem sie sich auf eingehendste mit dem allgemeinen Begriff der Schönheit und dessen Verhältnis zu den gelaufigeren Begriffen der Wahrheit und Guthelt befasst." (italics mine) Gerhard Bietmann, S.J., Allgemeine Asthetik, Freiburg, Herder, 1899, v. I, p.1.

(16) cf. Sikes, op.cit., p.91, n. "His (Aristotle's) lost work (On the Poets) seems to have defended poetry and discussed the ideal poet, besides dealing with the theory of inspiration." (italics mine)

et Apto." (17) Had these writings come down to us it is possible that European critical literature could have been saved some barren centuries. But, as it happened, everything conspired to make Aristotle's seeming neglect of inspiration the chief aesthetical influence in the new learning that began with the Middle Ages.

Meanwhile, sometime in the first three centuries of our era, appeared the $\pi\epsilon\rho\iota\ \delta\psi\omega\upsilon\varsigma$ of "Longinus". It is a work which, for various reasons, never had that influence on poetical theory which it deserved to have. (18) It is, indeed, a work of practical criticism rather than of aesthetics or critical theory. Yet it strikes a happy balance between a true appreciation of inspiration, and a judicial reverence for what is wise and well reasoned in the

(17) Confessions, IV, 13. The passage where Augustine mentions this work is one of the most delightfully human bits of ancient literature: "Et ista consideratio scaturivit in animo meo ex intimo corde, et scripsi libros de Pulchro et Apto, puto duos aut tres; tu scis Deus nam excidit mihi. Non enim habemus eos sed aberraverunt a nobis nescio quomodo."

(18) See Appendix A.



poets and orators of antiquity. Moreover, it is literary criticism based on sound theoretical principles; it would not, I think, be difficult to formulate out of the pages of "Longinus" a very acceptable system of aesthetics and poetical theory. We shall see much of "Longinus" in the course of this paper. I but mention the work here as one of the finest, if not the finest, critical work of antiquity, and as the first serious attempt to combine what is best in the Platonic and Aristotelian approaches to the problem of poetry. (19)

The first great European philosopher to understand and interpret Aristotle was never interested in aesthetics. Heresies against beauty were very far removed from the times in which Aquinas lived. There was no need of aesthetic theory or metaphysics for men who had dreamed of Notre Dame and fashioned the crystal mysteries of Chartres. Rheims was a-building and Amiens, and the mastery of "Holy Athens" was being seriously challenged for the first time.

(19) That is, to say he combines the claims of
 as p 12 in both its technical
 (τ & X v γ) and higher sense ("First and
 most important is the power of forming
 great conceptions."
 VIII, 1.) with the inspiration of Platonism
 (Ibid. VIII, 4.) cf. J.W.H. Atkins, Literary
 Criticism in Antiquity, Cambridge University
 Press, 1934, v.11, p. 250 ff.



Thomas, whose chief interest lay in the defense of truth, thought it superfluous to expound a theory of beauty in an age when even the humblest stone-cutter was a Prince of Pieria.

After the time of Thomas there was no other of the Schoolmen to refocus the Poetics, no one capable of putting into human language the spiritual visions of Plato and Augustine, so as to leave untouched all the mysticism and wonder, while limiting and defining all with the inimitable logic of Aristotle and the Doctor Angelicus.

Thus it happened that the great synthesis of scholastic philosophy contained little from the field of aesthetics and literary criticism. Because of this omission the first critical theorists of the Renaissance have little to offer. For though they professed to despise the system of the Schoolmen, in fact they depended on it for solidity of doctrine.

Here and there, however, especially among the Italian humanists, we find some creditable attempts to formulate a theory of poetic knowledge. (20)

(20) cf. e.g., Bremond, op. cit. p. 15, and J.E. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, London, Macmillan & Co., 1899.



But in an outline as brief as the present we need not dwell upon their work. For the rest, they had little to support them; "Aristotelianism," on the rediscovery of the Poetics was to be supreme in the field of aesthetics as it had been in other fields of philosophy. The time was ripe for the so-called "Classical Reaction."
(21)

Let us state at once that the "classicism" of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the classicism of Malherbe, Boileau, Fontenelle, Pope, was a thing of spurious growth. Men of lesser genius and insight than Aristotle, they forgot

(21) In a general way it is true that the history of poetical theory is a history of "classical" and "romantic" reactions, a swing of the pendulum between theories of reason and rule and theories of inspiration. On the other hand there is a world of wisdom in the closing remark of J.G. Robertson's Genesis of the Romantic Theory, (Cambridge University Press, 1923, p. 291): "To understand, not the antithesis of classicism and romanticism, but their synthesis, is the way progress lies."

his εὐφροσύνης, and ἀδύνατος, and
 ἐνθέου ἢ ποιήσεως, and could not see that his
Poetics was written in spite of poetical inspiration,
 not in denial of it. (22) For long years the
 classicists tried to breathe a semblance of life into
 what had become for them the dry bones of the Poetics.
 They studied, properly enough, the technique and
 craftsmanship of the poets, but they forgot what
 Socrates had long since discovered, and what Aristotle
 himself knew well, that poetry cannot be taught by
 rule (23) for them the συμπερὸς λόγος (24)

(22) It is, perhaps, too much to say that they forgot the need of the poet's being εὐφροσύνης but they have their own notion of what constitutes poetic talent. I do not mean, either, to deny some flashes of inspirational theory; but I am speaking of the general spirit of the "classical reaction."

(23) cf. e.g. Arthur Tilley, From Montaigne to Molière, London, John Murray, 1908. On page 116 he says of Chapelain: "A work, he held, could not be good if it offended against the rules But his faith in the rules went further than this. He believed that a knowledge of them sufficed for the production of a poem." etc.

(24) cf. Sophocles, Oed. Col., 442, 539, 620, 1150, (Jebb) See J.W. Mackail, Lectures on Greek Poetry, London, Longmans Green & Co., 1911, (2d. ed.) "Sophocles" p. 150: "In the Oedipus at Colonus the power of the word -- 'the little word,' συμπερὸς λόγος is a recurrent note."

was no longer a magnificent tragic concept, but a trim reckoning, a neat turn of phrase. Moreover, the times were troubled. Men's minds were pre-occupied with the Reformation, the advance of Science, Descartes, and the birth-throes of modern philosophy. Meanwhile the study of Aesthetics was left to these lesser men who expounded an uninspired Aristotelianism in a world of not very inspired poets.

I may state here that it is not my intention to minimize the importance of the Poetics as a guide to the study of Greek Tragedy. There is, perhaps, no better way of coming to a deep understanding of tragic writers than to consider with Aristotle the difficulties which were to be met, and to enter with him into the very workshop of the poet. After all, admiration of the Parthenon, for example, and wonder at the ideal of perfection which it embodies, is hardly enough. It is only when we come to appreciate the centuries of striving that preceded it, the care and devotion that went to the making of it, the delicacy and harmony of line of column, and architrave, and pediment, -- it is only then that we realize fully the meaning of it as a work of art.

At the same time we must not forget that a

technical study of this or any art may become mere "criticism" and leave almost untouched the poetry that lies hidden behind the technical mastery. There is more to the Parthenon than pyramidal corrections and rules for the corner triglyph; more, too, than the texture of the marble and the sculptured frieze. In much the same way in tragedy, behind the stage-craft, the mastery of language, the plot, the very characters, there lies hid the elusive vision of the poet, that will yield itself only to the sympathetic reader who allows the poem to conjure up for him the world of the poet's vision.

That the "classical" critics fall short of this sympathetic understanding of poetry, will be evident enough from the following brief passages cited by Bremond: (25)

"On ne sait, avait-il écrit (Fontenelle), ce qu'est le Prométhée d'Eschyle. Il n'y a ni sujet, ni dessein, mais des emportements fort poétiques et fort hardis. Je crois qu'Eschyle était une manière de fou qui avait l'imagination vive et pas trop réglée."

and the Abbé Trublet,

"Plus la raison se perfectionnera, plus le jugement sera préféré à l'imagination; et par conséquent moins les poètes se ront goûtés. Les premiers écrivains, dit-on, ont été poètes. Je le crois bien, ils ne

pouvaient guère être autre chose. Les
derniers seront philosophes."

The lovers of reason had exaggerated their claims even to absurdity; it was high time for the "Romantic Revival."

It is a far cry from the strictures of Fontenelle to the Prometheus of Shelley. But it was in Fontenelle's own France, in the year 1637, that Rene Descartes published the work which was to inaugurate the new philosophy, destined to become the philosophy of "romanticism."

It is passing strange that Descartes should stake everything on an appeal to reason, and yet be the father of the "romantic" movement. The classicists themselves had no other love; "aimez donc la raison," Boileau tells us. "The reason of Boileau," says a competent critic, "which he sets up as the true criterion of literary taste, is substantially identical with the reason of Descartes." (26) But there were enormous differences, differences so great and so essential as to outweigh the surface resemblances.

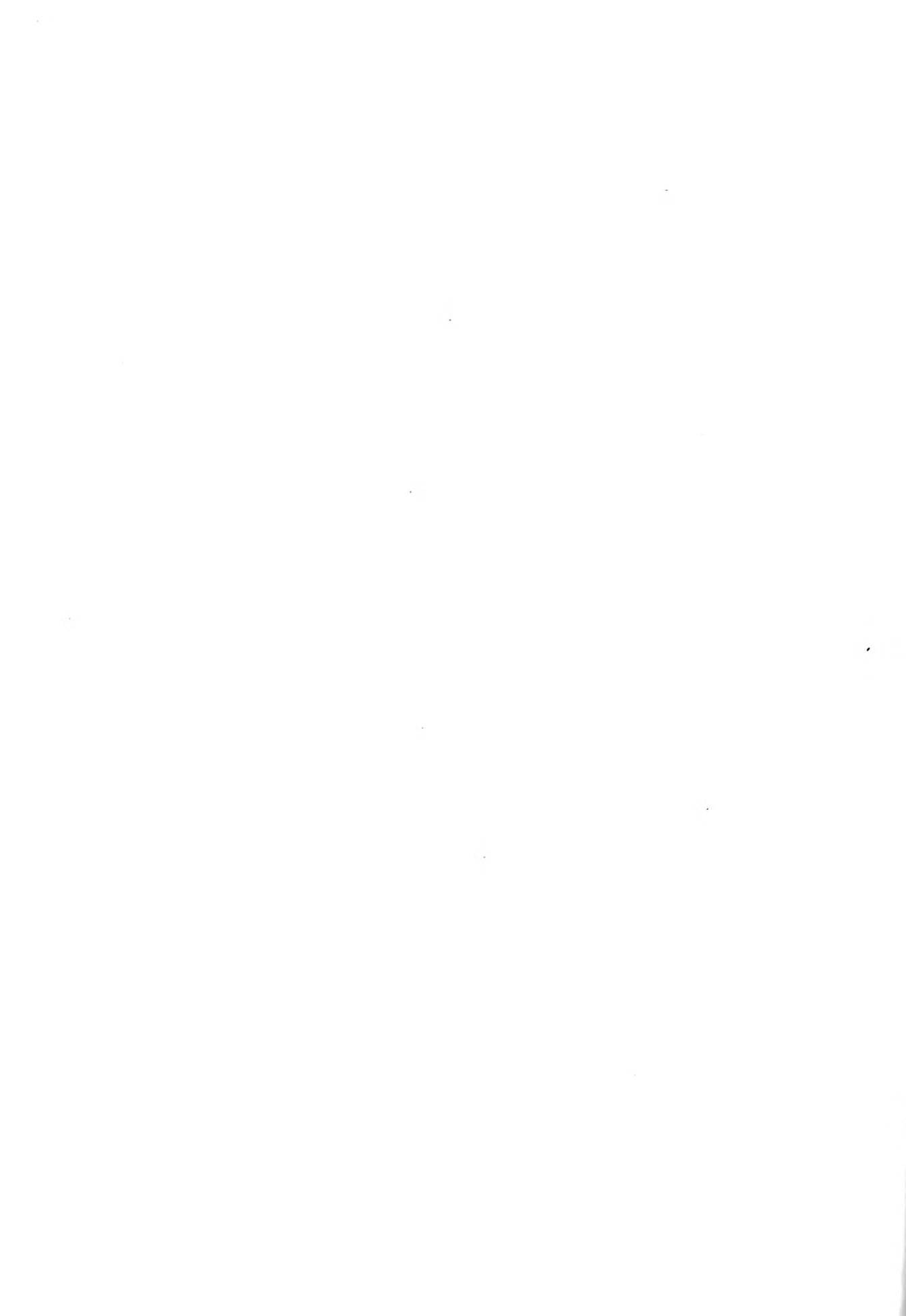
The "reason" of Boileau was simply a synonym for the neo-classical love of rules and traditions.

(26) Tilley, op. cit., p. 217.



There was nothing revolutionary in Boileau's theories. He was seeking to bound by ancient rules and precepts, and by appeal to the reason of the ages, that part of man which will not be bound, the spirit of inspiration and poetry. His appeal was an appeal to tradition against any sort of novelty or freedom. That which he called "reason" might just as rightly have been called tradition, or observance of the rules, or imitation of the ancients. The poets who rebelled against the "reason" of Boileau were merely asserting their age-old right to the inspiration of the Muses in the face of the deadening regulations of neo-classicism.

But the "reason" to which Descartes appealed was something far different. It was the faculty of the individual man, unrestrained by the wisdom of previous times, sufficient unto itself, a new power in the world of human thought. Descartes was trying to set free from the wisdom of the ages that part of man which cannot be free, the spirit of philosophy; thought cannot be free and subjective or it becomes free-thought and there is no longer any particular reason for thinking at all. The realm of truth is too vast for the intellect of any one man, even though that man be Descartes. Chaos was the inevitable goal of the new



philosophy. Worse still, the reason of Descartes was shot through with imagination, and imagination is the poorest of guides in things of the intellect.

(27) There could have been but one end to Descartes' glorification of the individual reason, the exaggerated individualistic idealism that has manifested itself in the works of Kant, Hegel, and Croce. (28) In the Cartesian philosophy human reason tried to build herself a house -- it is to wisdom alone that Scripture accords that privilege -- and the house tumbled like a house of cards.

Thus it was that the new "romanticism" in literature found no restraining influence in the new philosophy. Both developed along highly individualistic lines until in Croce we have the culmination of

(27) The too great importance of the imagination in the philosophy of Descartes shows itself in his basic demand for "clear and distinct ideas." In the field of cosmology especially his overconfidence in the imagination leads him into many errors.

(28) This is the line of descent which most interests us. The English empiricists, on the other hand, ended in Scepticism which is tantamount to Idealism.



all Cartesianism and all "romanticism" : every "lyrical intuition" and every bit of art criticism is a thing apart, a world unto itself, a mere landmark in the history of the human spirit. (29)

Without Descartes the reaction against neo-classicism would perhaps have been innocent enough. The refusal of the poets to accept any longer the precepts of neo-classicism was merely another of those reactions which are met with periodically in the history of art. The literary spirit of the Romantic Revival, which has lasted down to our own day, is not unlovely. It is a spirit of untrammelled genius that is akin to the wild sprites of Shelley's lyrics or Coleridge's "Spirit who sweepst the wild harp of time." The barriers are down and poetry "extra processit longe flammantia moenia mundi."

(30)

(29) cf. Benedetto Croce, Estetica, Bari, G. Laterza & Figli, 1912, p. 143.

(30) Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, I, 66-67.

Coleridge

"waves his wand, and the miracle is accomplished before our eyes in the open light of day; he takes words which have had the life used out of them by the common cry of poets, puts them into relation, and they rise up like his own dead mariners, wonderful with a supernatural animation." (31)

But, unfortunately, there was more to the Romantic Revival than the free effusion of genius. The chaotic freedom of the new philosophy made itself felt in a lessening of the critical spirit. The poet's reaction against the standards of neo-classicism was understandable enough, yet someone should have been zealous for the wisdom of the ages at a time when the poets were quite content to do without it. But the literary critics under the influence of the new philosophy became more "romantic" than the poets themselves. Appreciation rather than criticism became the vogue. DeQuincey, says Francis Thompson,

"was the first to practise that mode of criticism we call 'appreciation' -- be it a merit or not." (32)

(31) Francis Thompson, "Essay on Coleridge," Works, London, Burns Oates & Washburne, v.III 1913, p. 186.

(32) Ibid. p. 218.



I suppose that, in measure, we should say that appreciation is a merit; certainly the neo-classicists had too little of it. But the "appreciation" of the Romanticists was simply the result of a lack of a standard of values, and a failure to distinguish between what is ephemeral in poetry and what is of lasting value. As Eliot says, there was and is a tendency in criticism to demand of poetry "not that it be well written, but that it be 'representative of its age!'" (33)

As early as 1850 Egger, though he was keenly aware of the deadening influence of the Poetics in previous centuries, felt the need of a return to the ancient belief in the laws of beauty and truth:

"Dans un siècle comme le notre, où toutes les littératures du monde connu se rencontrent et se mêlent, a force d'impartialité et d'indulgence pour les formes infiniment variées de la poésie chez tant de peuples divers, on oublie volontiers qu'il y a dans les arts une règle universelle du goût. La lecture de la Poétique est un remède salutaire contre cette maladie de l'esprit moderne. Les erreurs d'Aristote nous montrent le danger des théories

(33) T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, London, Faber & Faber, 1933, "Introduction," p. 25.

exclusives; mais, en même temps, la simplicité féconde et claire de ses principaux axiômes, le constant à propos de quelques uns de ses préceptes nous assurent contre les tentations trop communes du scepticisme littéraire et nous donnent foi en l'éternelle vérité des lois du beau." (34)

This "literary scepticism" of which he speaks did not become less with the turn of the century. Mr. Saintsbury, who does full justice to the critic's indifference to an "official schedule" in judging a work of art, nevertheless admits that:

"It is rare to find two critics of competence liking just the same things; it is rarer still to find them liking the same things for the same reason." (35)

The fact is we have not yet seen the end of "romanticism" and "literary scepticism." The poets

(34) Emile Egger, Essai sur L'histoire de la Critique chez les Grecs, Deuxieme Edition, Paris, G. Pedone Lauriel, 1886, p. 342.

(35) George Saintsbury, A History of Criticism, London, Blackwood & Sons, 1904, v. III, p. 607. I have refrained from consulting Saintsbury while writing this chapter, lest I should become like a philosopher of my acquaintance, who has succeeded in mastering the history of philosophy so thoroughly that every statement he makes calls to his mind some five or six vigorous objections.



still revel in the delights of "inspiration;" the philosophers are not yet weary of their new found freedom; the literary critics still practise that "mode of criticism which we call 'appreciation.'" There is something to be said for the "ancient English custom" of throwing an old shoe "at the wedding of every poet with the muse." (36) There is, too, a deal of wisdom in that other old bridal custom:

"Something old and something new;
Something borrowed and something blue."

But in modern times everything must be new as this year's coinage, and the critics are very careful of what they throw:

"Gertrude Stein has carried Mallarmé's principles so far.... as perhaps finally to reduce them to absurdity." (37)

Perhaps, that is to say, there is no such thing as absurdity. "Never," as T.S. Eliot remarks, "were there fewer settled assumptions as to what poetry is or why it comes about, or what it is for." (38)

(36) Francis Thompson, op. cit., p. 185.

(37) Quoted in Contemporary Trends, ed. J.H. Nelson, N.Y., Macmillan, 1933, p. 297--from Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle, Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1931.

(38) op. cit., p. 27.



Saintsbury very prudently warns us, when summarizing the "revolt," that

"no single and tolerably homogeneous document could possibly here be drawn up, for there would be minority (and sometimes majority) counter-reports on every article."

(39) But let us be imprudent and set down here, as typical of the "revolt," and in opposition to the prophecy of Abbé Taubert, this other prophecy of Schelling quoted by Croce:

"Verrà tempo che la filosofia tornerà nella poesia dalla quale si è distaccata; e sulla nuova filosofia sorgerà una nuova mitologia." (40)

Let us be even bolder and say that the philosophers and critics of the "revolt" have reduced freedom to absurdity.

And here we may conclude this brief resume of the history of literary criticism. That what I have said is hopelessly inadequate as a history of criticism, I am well aware. For example, no mention has been made in these last pages of such important phenomena as the criticism of Arnold and the poetry of Leopardi and Chesterton. But what I have been mainly

(39) op. cit., v. III, p. 408

(40) op. cit., p. 342.

interested in here was not the history of criticism as such, but the history of the two great theories of criticism, the theory of inspiration and the theory of wisdom, "romanticism" and "classicism." And if I, too, may be allowed to prophesy, I would say that we shall not again see great poetry or great criticism until wisdom once more takes its proper place of excellence in the estimation of men.

CHAPTER II

In such a brief outline as that just given it is, of course, impossible to indicate all the complex developments in the history of literary criticism. But from what we have seen in the last chapter this much is clear, that art criticism like art itself moves in ever recurring cycles. Underneath all the varied theories there lies hid the fundamental artistic antithesis, inspiration and reason, genius and wisdom, freedom and law, in a word romanticism and classicism. There can be no doubt that all the great masters of aesthetical theory have been occupied with some phase or other of this antithesis. We can, then, do no better than begin our discussion with a consideration of the essential characteristics of romanticism and classicism.

To many this will seem a singularly inexact beginning for an aesthetical theory. The terms romantic and classical, it will be urged, have grown so great as to defy anything like definition. That being so, we should have in a classico-romantic aesthetic merely a more or less interesting personal opinion but not a standard for all times and places,

not a law of beauty of universal application. Yet how else shall we begin? Classicism and Romanticism stand like the Symplegades at the very entrance of our quest. How are we to enter at all if we do not solve their secret? On what will it profit us to come with banners flying and sails unfurled if we are to dash our craft on one or the other? No theory of aesthetics will ever be brought safely into harbour unless it allows for both. We have seen how the criticism of the last few centuries was always lacking something of perfection. The neo-classicists had too little of the divine fire; the romanticists too little of the divine calm of reason. Sooner or later we shall have to decide how much of the one and how much of the other enters into what we call the beautiful. We cannot be forever satisfied with the old mariner's solution to his helmsman's quandary: "Sire, if we do not yare we shall be carried on the rocks." "Then, yare." "Ay, but if we yare we shall be carried out to sea." "Then, do not yare." Clearly, there must be some middle course.

And that is a second reason for beginning our study with classicism and romanticism. The truth always lies somewhere between two extremes. Nothing in the whole history of philosophy and human thought

shines out more clearly than that single fact.

"being is many;" "being is one." Between those two statements the great test of ancient and modern philosophers alike tread their precarious way. It is, then, with high hopes that we begin the search for the secret of poetry in the region that lies between the romantic and classical extremes. But first we must know the extremes. Then, at the last, we may expect to find that as being is one and yet many, so great poetry will be at once romantic and classical.

Finally, it is important to remember that the two poets we here plan to study are typical, the one of the romantic the other of the classical genius. It would be hard to find a better example of the *μαυρίκῶς ὀβριεῖς* than Aeschylus, or a better example of *σοφία* and *τέχνη* than Sophocles. More than that, they afford us an unique opportunity for studying the two forms of poetry in their highest manifestation. Each of them was a great poet in his own right, unrivalled in an age and a city that brooked no mediocrity. Between them they brought to fulfillment the rich promise of Athens in an art form that is of all the most serious and sublimated. Disparate in technique, in use of language,

in stage-craft, the one burning and searing like the signal fires of the Alamannon, the other calm and serene as the peaks of Colorado, in this they are one, in their undeniable greatness. In their dramas, if anywhere, we may expect to find the secret of great poetry.

We hope, then, in the following study of the romantic and classical to arrive at definite conclusions which will not only help us in our study of the two poets, but which will in turn be further clarified by the lessons Aeschylus and Sophocles have to teach us. We shall not commit ourselves too much beforehand to any rigid theory. Rather we shall try to recapture the spirit that animates all great poetry be it classical or romantic. Provisionally we assume three things. First, that there is a thing called poetry with an eidos or essence of its own, an essence disputed about in theory but unmistakably present in all the world's masterpieces. Second, that poetry is not limited to any time or place, not bound by any fast rules of rhetoric or dictates of fashion. It transcends classicism and romanticism; yet each of them participates in it. Third, we assume that Aeschylus and Sophocles are by common consent to be accounted



truly great poets. Any of these three assumptions may, of course, be called into question. But we cannot well do with anything less if we are to continue our present study. Without labouring the point for the present, we may say that three less debatable propositions can hardly be found in the field of literary criticism. For the rest we here advance them as a physicist his hypothesis, and look for their justification in the following experiment.

Let us begin with the consideration of romanticism. It is, of course, notorious that no satisfactory definition of the word has as yet been found. Many competent critics, after long and careful investigation, have given the word various and contradictory meanings. (1)

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- (1) cf. Arthur O. Lovejoy, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms" in *P.M.L.A.*, v. XXXIX, (June, 1924) p. 231 ff:
 "For Professor Ker Romanticism was 'the fairy way of writing,' and for Mr. Gosse it is inconsistent with 'keeping to the facts;' but for Mr. F. Y. Eccles (following M. Pellissier) 'the romantic system of ideas' is the direct source of 'the realistic error' To Professor Ker, again, 'romantic' implied 'reminiscence': 'the romantic schools have always depended more or less on the past.' But Professor Schelling tells us that 'the classic temper studies the past, the romantic temper neglects it...' "etc.

Similarly the origins of romanticism have been traced as far back as the serpent in the Garden of Eden, or have been placed as late as the time of Rousseau. (2) Professor Lovejoy, after a thorough study of the question, offers us a solution of despair. His suggestion is that we should learn to speak, not of Romanticism, but of Romanticisms; that we should resolve each kind into its elements and then see what the different kinds have in common. (3) It is assuredly impossible for us to enter here upon so exhaustive a piece of research. Yet, since the definitions which Lovejoy cites are so obviously inadequate, I shall venture on a somewhat a priori definition of romanticism. It is, of course, not wholly a priori: it is based ultimately on my own analysis of various types of romanticism. But it rests chiefly on my conviction that there is a definite romantic outlook whether on literature or life, a basic romantic viewpoint which persists, in spite of all accidental

(2) Ibid. p. 230.

(3) Ibid. p. 235 ff.

differences, throughout all "romantic" theories. This being so, it should be a reasonably simple matter to isolate the essential elements which influence the romanticist's attitude towards life and letters. And I feel confident that the following definition satisfies all of Professor Lovejoy's requirements: romanticism is that way of thinking which gives first place in poetry and philosophy to inspiration and intuition.

This is true of the naturalistic romanticism of Rousseau, the mystical romanticism of Schelling, the philosophical romanticism of Descartes, the artistic romanticism of recent poetry and the theory of Croce. Whether the object of cognition be nature or divinity or metaphysics or beauty, the romanticist is satisfied with nothing less than immediate perception, intuition, the inspiration of a moment. That is the essential romantic attitude. The denial of objective reality and beauty, the exaggerated interest in naturalism, the love or neglect of the past, the notion that the critic can never judge but only appreciate, the concept of the artist no longer as a seer but as a creator, none of

these is of the essence of romanticism. The essential thing is simply this, that somehow in the supreme moments of life man is favoured with a direct experience of things that for the most part he but sees through a glass darkly : Saul on the road to Damascus, Plato and the vision of the first and only fair, Aeschylus and Dante and Augustine.

It is important that we should remember this fundamental romantic characteristic. It is a sort of least common denominator for everything that has been called by the name. Unless we bear this well in mind we shall be lost in the welter of seemingly contradictory romanticisms, and never understand what romanticism truly is or its true place in life and art.

Unfortunately the neo-classic reactionaries of le grand siècle and most of the modern reactionaries, Babbitt for example, do not take this larger view of the Romantic attitude. They seem to forget that the desire to behold perfect beauty face to face is at least as old as Plato. They fix upon the excesses of a single period and in their eagerness to correct those excesses condemn outright the undefined longings and searchings which are the very raison d'être of poetry.

I say the very raison d'etre of poetry because it is impossible not to sense in the great poets the glory and wonder of a direct vision not given to every man, or given in a lesser degree. We cannot deny the fact, nor can we explain it away. Neither can we hope by legislation or argument to wither man's desire for such visions and for such inspirations. True, we are in Plato's phrase "as men living in a cave" or as Paul has it we "see through a glass darkly." Yet there is given to us all, and to poets beyond all others, some foretaste of the light inaccessible and a promise of the vision of perfect beauty. This we ask of the poet, that he bring us, besides the particular beauty of his vision, a keener realization of the latent power within us of knowing in an instant and loving the vision of the first and only fair. There is within us

"an unconquerable love of whatever is
elevated and more divine than we.
Wherefore not even the entire universe
suffices for the thought and contemplation

within the reach of the human mind." (4)

This δὲ αὐτὸς ἔρως it is which prevents man from ever stopping short of his last goal.

We may now turn our attention to the attitude which the classicist adopts towards life and poetry. There is comparatively little disagreement as to what constitutes the essence of classicism. Unlike the romanticist, the classicist is not often found very far outside the chartered course. But though his quest may seem less venturesome, prosaic even, yet there is a

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- (4) "Longinus" περὶ ὑψηλοῦς XXXV, 2-3.
 (Trans. by W. Rhys Roberts, Longinus on the Sublime, Cambridge University Press, 1907)
 This testimony of "Longinus" is very much to the point. It might appear that I am being too idealistic in my demands on poetry. But I am confessedly considering poetry "in its highest manifestations." So far forth the whole spirit of this study is Platonic, and necessarily so. It seems to me quite useless to attempt a definition of poetry after the Aristotelian fashion. That is to say, it is futile to seek the least possible requirements, in the absence of which we shall have to say, "this is not poetry." That way we should never arrive at the term of our endeavours. Rather, with Plato, we must look to the heights of supreme achievement to find the ideal essence of beauty and poetry and we shall have to admit that one is really a poet in so far as he approaches that ideal.

certainty and majesty about it, and the course lies straight under the unchanging stars. A true classicist clings fast to wisdom, the wisdom of the ages, and if he look for beauty he is certain he shall find it if only he finds truth. The tendency to look on beauty and truth and goodness as one, is essential to classicism. The classicist, to use the metaphysician's phrase, holds that beauty is a transcendental. So truth becomes a criterion of beauty in much the same way that dogmatic theology is a criterion of mysticism.

For this reason classicism is often opposed to those forms of romanticism which look to "escape from reality" or cultivate "illusion for illusion's

sake." (5) But since, as we have seen, these aberrations are not representative of true romanticism, such opposition is misleading. In the same way romanticism is often opposed to those forms of classicism which deal with rules of diction and metre, and figures of rhetoric, and conventions. But the real opposition lies on a higher plane. It

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- (5) Irving Babbitt, The New Laokoon, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1910, p. 85. What references I have made to Babbitt are not to be understood as implying that he was unaware of the fact that Rousseauistic romanticism is not the whole of romanticism. He keeps repeating that the naturalists are not true Platonists. He knows that his use of the word "romantic" is "irritating," (p. 108) and he admits that there are romanticists and romanticists and that the word is hard to define accurately. (p. 109) But when he himself comes to defining it (p. 109-110) he tells us that the common trait of romanticists is a "love of the wonderful rather than the probable..." "A man's temper grows romantic in proportion as he is interested in the marvellous, in adventure and surprise, rather than in tracing cause and effect.... Whenever the love of adventure is keen, and the analytical and logical faculties are either dormant or occupied elsewhere, art may very well come to be looked on as a pleasant vagabondage." (*Italics mine*) This is to define romanticism by its excesses and defects, to rule it out of court by definition, to avoid trying to understand it. His neo-humanistic solution, too, is influenced by his indignatio; it is a matter of imposing law on licence, and the more he insists that this law is not formalism the clearer it becomes that it is. His dangerous disease needs a severe remedy.

has to do with the romanticist's immediate insight of reality and his belief in inspiration, and the classicist's calm knowledge of the highest laws of truth and beauty "eternal in the heavens, not of today or yesterday." (6)

But if we put the problem in this way we begin to see that the two complement each other and mingle mysteriously in the vision of the poet. The great poet knows with a sure knowledge that the harbour lies ahead and yet he rejoices with a great joy when the beacon light shines on the waters. If his knowledge were less his joy would be less full; but without the vision of the light his joy would be less satisfying. A similar mystery occurs in an act of faith: a man may have certain rational knowledge of a truth, but when faith comes the fervour of his assent is

(6) Sophocles, Antigone, 453-454.

out of all proportion to his rational certainty. (7)
 When such things occur our intellectual labor is perfected, our will is inflamed, and all the lesser faculties of our soul are at rest; "Et facta est tranquillitas magna." In faith this perfection is supernatural; in the perception of the beautiful it is purely natural. But in each case the experience is unique. And somehow man's esthetic experiences are a promise, a promise of the vision of the Sun of

(7) This statement would require much explaining. But anyone reading the last pages of M.C. D'Arcy's The Nature of Belief will see what is meant and will find many interesting parallels between an act of faith and the final vision of the poet, for example:

"The lamp of private judgment is needed to find the way; once we have reached home there is no need of it." (p. 307)
 "A student of music may come to Bach and be captivated by his genius. In time he arrives at the state in which he can with great surceness recognize the music of Bach, its texture and significance. But suppose that by some accident he has never heard the music of the Passion, until one day he is invited to a performance of it. As he listens he suddenly feels that for the first time he has really understood Bach, that he has been admitted into the secret of his mind. There will come then in one and the same act a knowledge of the Passion music, of the interpretation of Bach, and a new understanding of all the previous music that he has heard."

M.C. D'Arcy S.J., The Nature of Belief, London, Sheed and Ward, 1931, p.331.

Truth that Plato tells us of, a promise of the god-like contemplation of Aristotle, a far-off promise, maybe, of the Beatific Vision, in which the romanticist's desire is stilled with the immediateness of the intuition, and the classicist's love of truth is satisfied with the only object that "suffices for the thought and contemplation within the reach of the human mind." (8)

That these things can be is the mystery of the poet's vision, a mystery that in the last analysis "must always remain ineffable." (9) But, graceless as the task may be, this is the mystery that we must analyze. Is there something that unifies and reconciles in the poet's vision the unvarying laws of truth and beauty with that "outburst of the divine spirit within him which it is difficult to bring

(8) When I speak of art being a "promise" I have in mind no previous theory of aesthetics. I mean that art as we experience it must foreshadow for the classicist the possibility of a supreme sapientia, and for the romanticist a perfect intuition. Even the extreme romanticism of futurism "promises" intuition, and though it is empty of wisdom can yet exercise a momentary appeal, a fact inexplicable to the rigid classical theorist. Surrealism however, in my opinion, promises neither the one nor the other.

(9) Henri Bremond, Prière et Poésie, "Introduction," p. XII.

under the rules of law?" (10) Must he in this present dispensation of plodding reason, either despair of truth or else be untrue to that "divine spirit within him?" Or is there possible to him, as it would seem, a special kind of vision, and if so, how is that possible? To find the answer to such questions we shall have to consider the object of his vision, the nature of the beautiful.

There have been countless definitions of the beautiful by philosophers of all ages. A thorough study of even a few of them would enlarge hopelessly the scope of this work. Famous among them are the "id quod visum placet" of Thomas, the "splendor veri" of supposedly Platonic origin, the "splendor ordinis" perhaps Augustine's, "perfectio rei," and a number of definitions that have to do with the theme of harmony and proportion, "unitas cum varietate", and the like. All of them are based on the realistic metaphysics which, in the main, Plato, Aristotle, Augustine and the Scholastics hold in common. They all suppose an eternal unchanging exemplar, the cause of all truth, which, we may hold with Augustine, is the divine essence, and they all suppose imitations of that exemplar which,

(10) "Longinus," Op. cit., XXXIII, 5.

let us say, are the intelligible forms of existing things. And in so far as existing things become more perfect imitations of their kind, the truth and right order of them shines out with a more compelling radiance, their perfection takes on a new meaning, their harmony and proportion becomes more evident and appealing, in short they become more and more the sort of things which delight if we but know them.

The difficulty of expressing in a single formula all the various aspects and degrees of beauty is obvious. Such a formula must be deeply metaphysical for beauty is as universal as being, yet it must have a glow to it not usual in philosophical dicta; it must apply to the humblest forms of the beautiful and yet be true of beauty in its highest and most perfect manifestations; it must be at once as clear in outline yet as many faceted as beauty itself. That there can be such a formula we may well doubt. But there is an expression of Augustine's that seems to me to serve the purpose uncommonly well. He himself uses the phrase casually in another connection and so far as I know never offers it as a definition

of beauty. (11)

The expression is pax formae. If we take the words in their simplest sense they express accurately, and yet in an appropriately poetical fashion, the harmony and repose of the beautiful as we ordinarily picture it to ourselves. It is this we have in mind when we speak of the form of a work of art; it was this the Romans meant when they called a beautiful thing formosus. Even the more restless works of art, such as the great mediæval cathedrals, have their own form and order. For Chartres is distinguished from the Parthenon in this that it is still seeking a perfection that lies above it; the walls are no longer enclosures but lancet windows reaching heavenwards to the light, and the soaring arches are supported by the rightness and order of the pinnacled buttresses.

To speak of the beautiful in works of art as

(11)

Augustinus, De Vera Religione Liber Unus, caput XI, (Collectio Selecta SS. Ecclesiae Patrum, Formis Centesimus Undecimus, Parisiis, Parent-Desbarres, 1836, p.334.)
"Ergo ab eo factum est et corpus, qui omnis concordiae caput est. Habet corpus quandam pacem suae formae, sine qua prorsus nihil esset. Ergo ille est et corporis conditor, a quo pax omnis est, et qui forma est infabricata, atque omnium formosissima."
 cf. also De Civitate Dei, Liber XIX, c. XIII, (Ibid. p. 37.) "Pax omnium rerum, tranquillitas ordinis."

pax formae may give the impression of a bias in favor of classicism. But the word pax is not to be understood as wholly static in connotation; it also implies the joy of achievement, and the contentment of fulfilled desire. For this reason no true artist, romantic or classical, will admit that any change should be made in that which is beauty.

· ἔνθα κ' ἔπειτα καὶ ἰθάνατος περ ἐπελθών
 θεήσαστο ἰδών καὶ τεοφθεῖη φρεσὶν ἦσιν

But it is in its deeper metaphysical sense⁽¹²⁾

that this formula really touches on the essence of the beautiful. We have noted that in the realistic metaphysics, which we are here simply adopting as the most generally satisfactory, existing things imitate in their intelligible form the perfect exemplar. And in so far as that form imitates more nearly the ideal, it approaches the term of its perfection which is pax. In the strict sense any slightest perfection which a thing possesses is so far forth an attainment of the ideal. So everything which exists, by that very fact, possesses some beauty. On the other hand nothing but the all-perfect exemplar which is the divine essence exhausts all the possibilities of the beautiful and has within it a perfectam pacem suae

(12) Homer, Odyssey V. 72-73. I am indebted to Professor Grube for noting that in these lines of Homer we have what is perhaps the first definition of beauty.

formae. It is the poet's prerogative to behold in the more or less imperfect things which surround us, the beauty which could be theirs, that state of peaceful fulfillment in which they would mirror as perfectly as a creature can the different aspects of the forma infabricata. This is the meaning of Sophocles' famous remark that he "painted men as they ought to be." (13) And in general this is characteristic of the real classical attitude, which, as we have seen, tends to look on beauty as identical with the higher laws of truth.

But our definition creates a difficulty which is crucial: if beauty be identified with truth, how are we to save ourselves from the excesses of the neo-classicists, how distinguish the poet's knowledge from the knowledge of the philosopher? This, I repeat, is the crucial question, the question of the nature of the poet's vision.

It is, as Bremond says, no novelty "to say that poetic activity is distinguished from rational."

(13) Aristotle, Poetics XXV 6. Butcher's edition - but not his translation.

And he continues:

"Le torrent de la tradition a toujours admis cette différence capitale. La nouveauté, et c'est là, je le redis, tout le romantisme, ost d'exalter cette expérience, de la tenir pour souverainement noble et bienfaisante, au lieu que Platon, Aristote, Plotin, Lamotte, Buffier, la méprisent, précisément parce qu'elle n'est pas rationnelle." (14)

Bremond here touches upon the very heart of the controversy and shows quite clearly just what it is that ancient and modern classicists tend to object to in the romantic view of life. The mention of Plato, however, raises a special problem, since he himself was so evidently influenced by the very inspiration which at times he patently fears and seems to despise. We shall keep Plato well in mind in the following discussion, for any theory of poetic vision which would, however imperfectly, solve the riddle of Plato's intense love and fear of poetry would by that very fact somehow justify its existence. We may even say that Plato is a very touchstone that reveals the dross of adulterated theories of poetry.

Thus it will not do to try to reduce poetry to reason, for there is something in Plato more divine than reason. Nor will it do to divorce poetry from reason or emancipate it from the laws of truth,

(14) op. cit., p. 82.

for the poet Plato was a lover of truth and reason. It will not do to approach the problem, as M. Maritain does, as one of the practical intellect, for Plato was more than a craftsman. (15) Nor can we approach it with the untechnical and formless sympathies of the moderns, for Plato was a masterful artist. What can that vision be, which Plato had, even if he knew it not, which is not purely rational yet not divorced from reason, which conforms to the classical love of truth yet is bright with the radiance of romantic inspiration, which deals with imperfect things and yet sees them in the light of that which is perfect, which attains in visible things the invisible and in sorry imitations that pacem formae which is beauty?

Let us suppose for the present that this vision is within the natural powers of man. Against this supposition lies the fact that it is often felt to be superhuman, a divine gift. Perhaps, indeed, in some

(15) I do not mean that M. Maritain in Art and Scholasticism confines himself to considerations of poetry as a craft. His work is more far reaching than that and filled with excellent things. But since his ultimate aim is evidently an understanding of poetry and the fine arts, I believe that the approach is actually harmful.

cases it may be, and I myself rather think that oftentimes it is. But in the minds of many who offer such an explanation, the solution is too simple. Such persons would make criticism impossible and create a whole realm of truth beyond the domain of reason. They lose sight of the fact that even the undeniably divine gift of mystical revelation is subject to the laws of reason and that, as Père de Guibert says in this regard,

"Le caractère surnaturel de notre vie intérieure ne modifie pas nécessairement le dessin psychologique de cette vie; là même où il le modifie, ce n'est pas en y introduisant violemment des éléments complètement étrangers, mais bien en aidant, complétant, transformant, élevant ce qui constitue déjà notre activité psychique naturelle." (16)

Besides, however exalted a view we may take of the poet's inspiration there is good reason for believing that it is not always impossible to lesser mortals, that we may all experience it when we contemplate a masterpiece of art or nature, and that the further excellence of the poet or craftsman lies in capturing it forever in words, or on stone, or in melodies, or on canvas. At least we may believe that the aesthetic experiences of a genius are not different from ours in kind.

(16) Quoted by Bremond, op. cit., p. 87

But where within the compass of our nature are we to look for an explanation of the extraordinary clearness and delight of poetic knowledge? Certainly not in the ordinary workings of our intellect, not, that is to say, in the tentative steps of our reason. Romanticists are clearly right when they insist on the immediateness of the perception of the beautiful. And immediateness is not characteristic of the groping reason, which proceeds slowly from cause to effect, from principles to conclusions, from the known to the unknown.

Yet even in the strictly rational psychology of St. Thomas reason is by no means identified with intelligence. (17) Intelligence is conceived as a nobler exercise of man's power of knowledge, akin to that of the angels. (18) It is not divorced from reason, but is the crown and perfection of reason, which last is said to

(17) cf. Régis Jolivet, "L'intuition Intellectuelle et Le Problème de la Métaphysique," Archives de Philosophie, v. XI, cahier II, p. 36 ff.

This is a lengthy and altogether admirable treatment of the whole question of intuition. The author is not concerned with the aesthetic implications of his thesis. But that fact only makes his testimony all the more valuable for our purpose.

(18) Jolivet, Ibid., p. 39.

have its rise "in umbra intelligentiae." (19)

The exercise of the mind's inherent intuitive power "procède d'un état psychologique préparé par de longues et patientes recherches, par une méditation obstinée et persévérante, c'est-à-dire d'un habitus intellectuel, dont le jeu échappe à la conscience claire." (20) This habitus in the poet, is the wisdom of the classicist, the instinctive love of what is best and finest, the seeing life steadily and seeing it whole. In the light of that wisdom it is easy for him to see in an instant things hidden from ordinary minds. Thus, too, the mathematician, after long and elaborate preparation, comes suddenly at last upon the truth he has been seeking. Thus the philosopher, after lengthy reasoning and reflexion comes suddenly to the goal of his endeavors. In the following passage Jolivet describes the flowering of the mind's hard-won awareness of truth:

(19) Jolivet, *Ibid.*, n. 3 and cf. p. 46 note, "La *consideratio* (terme emprunté à saint Bernard) est l'intuition intellectuelle préparée par l'*inquisitio rationis*."

(20) Jolivet, *op. cit.*, p.47.

Or, de l'intuition comme telle il n'y a pas de méthode, du moins directe et immédiate: elle est comme la récompense inattendue d'un long effort, la floraison subite et inespérée de la vérité. Ce qui s'enseigne, ce qui s'apprend, ce sont les procédés rationnels qui conditionnent la floraison. Travail de préparation et d'adaptation qui est indispensable, mais qui a surtout la valeur d'un removens proniens, d'une suppression des obstacles, d'une élaboration méthodique des matériaux, qu'un ordre ultérieur-- l'idée incluse en l'intuition-- devra informer. D'où l'aspect gratuit de l'intuition, le sentiment de nouveauté, qui l'accompagne, l'éclat radieux de création qui l'environne. Florida novitas mundi. On s'explique par là qu'on y ait toujours décelé comme un don ou une illumination, et que l'artiste, en œuvres intelligibles comme en œuvres sensibles, parle souvent d'une véritable passivité dans la réception de la lumière. Et c'est pourquoi aussi toujours une humilité profonde signale le vrai génie." (21)

Is then this fruition of a long seeking and a great love of truth, the secret of the poet's inspiration? Is this the nature of his visitation? Certainly it is very like, yet just as certainly this is not enough to explain fully his inspiration. The very fact that the philosopher enjoys intuitions is enough to prove that the poet's vision is something more. Yet, without seeking outside man's natural powers, what more than this is possible? Is the poet, after all, to be distinguished from the philosopher only in that he is a technician, a master of word and phrase? Or

Is there possible some further difference in the nature of his intuition? It seems to me that there is such a difference, an essential difference, due to that classical love of wisdom to which we have referred.

To put it in a word, the poet, qua poet, is interested in sapientia; the philosopher is often interested merely in scientia. That is to say, the philosopher in trying to understand a thing is apt to be satisfied, after the manner of Aristotle, with knowing the least minimum essential which differentiates it from other things. But the poet, with Plato, wants to know its pacem formae, the fullness of it and the perfection of its beauty, and he wants to see mirrored in it as perfectly as possible the beauty of the forma infabricata, the divine exemplar. Little wonder that in those rare moments when his mind attains to an intuition of his ideal, he is raised out of himself and seems like one divinely inspired. This is why Plato in his loftiest passages has been called a poet because he was ever striving towards that intuitio sapientiae which is, as Jolivet says

"en même temps source de joie et de paix, en tant qu'elle est l'intuition, non seulement du vrai, mais aussi du bien, connaissance savoureuse et affective, dit saint Thomas, sapida scientia." (22)

(22) Jolivet, op. cit., p. 53

Yet Plato was all the more a lover of reason, since it was reason which prepared the way for those flashes of poetical intuition which are given only to the wise. (23)

In conclusion, then, we may say that the vision of a great poet has in it all the wisdom of the classicist and all the inspiration of the romanticist, for it is an Intuitio sapientias. Real inspiration must flow from wisdom, for if inspiration flow not from wisdom it is untrue and illusory, it is not the inspiration of great poetry. This is the secret of the great poets of the world. The failure of the lesser poets of the romantic school lies in this, that they tried to attain to the inspiration of the masters but knew nothing of that wisdom which gave them their greatness. The failure of the pseudo-classic poets, on the other hand, lies in this that they were satisfied with a fruitless imitation of wisdom, and never yearned for the gift of inspiration. Yet true wisdom cannot but be inspired, for,

(23) See appendix B.

"sapientiae donum eminentiam cognitionis
habet per quandam unionem ad divina
quibus non unimur nisi per amoris --- et
ideo sapientiae donum dilectionem quasi
principium supponit, et sic in affectione
est." (24)

And if it be objected that this concept of wisdom does violence to the meaning of $\sigma\circ\varphi\iota\alpha$, there is Plato to deny the objection. (25) It is this element of love that accompanies true wisdom which perfects the poet's vision and breathes into it the very fire of life. It is this which causes the whole soul to vibrate in sympathy and rejoice with

(24) S. Thomas, III Sent., d.35, q.2, art. 1, sol. 5.

(25) It is enough to recall the Phaedrus and Symposium and that remarkable passage in the Republic already quoted in Chapter I.

a great joy. (26)

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- (26) To use Aristotle's phraseology, the peculiar joy of aesthetic experience comes from the full and intense exercise of the highest faculties, an exercise made easy by sympathy and love. Listen to Coleridge's description of poetry:

"It is that pleasurable emotion, that peculiar state and degree of excitement, which arises in the poet himself in the act of composition;- and in order to understand this we must combine a more than ordinary sympathy with the objects, emotions, or incidents contemplated by the poet, consequent on a more than common sensibility, with a more than ordinary activity of the mind in respect of the fancy and the imagination. Hence is produced a more vivid reflection of the truths of nature and of the human heart, united with a constant activity modifying and correcting these truths by that sort of pleasurable emotion, which the exertion of all our faculties gives in a certain degree; but which can only be felt in perfection under the full play of those powers of mind, which are spontaneous rather than voluntary, and in which the effort required bears no proportion to the activity enjoyed."

"Definition of Poetry," Works, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1864 v. IV, ("Lectures upon Shakespeare" etc.) p.20.

It is this which makes possible the vision itself.

As D'Arcy says:

"Desire has a trick of racing ahead, and like a child calls on its elder brother, the mind, to follow it. It is folly at times to listen to this cry, and desire should never be allowed to run out of sight, but if there is an answering call in the blood, if all that is best in one leaps to respond, then it is the purest wisdom to go forward, because, as St. Augustine said, there is an inclination deep down within us which is the love of God: 'We ascend Thy ways that be in our heart and sing a song of degrees.'" (27)

(27) The Nature of Belief, p. 65.

CHAPTER III

The vision of the poet, as we have seen, is something that is the poet's alone. No man can share it; it remains a mystery apart in the soul of the poet. He cannot express it for it is of its nature inexpressible; it is a kind of knowledge, but human words were never meant to describe it.

Yet, somehow, by the magic of imagery, and the music of verse, and the wizardry of language, he makes a like vision shine upon the soul of his hearers. From earliest times this miracle of communication captivated the attention of mankind no less than the greater miracle of vision itself. The poets were called singers, *ᾄδοντες*, as well as seers and "sweet song," even in Homer's time was a "gift of God's giving." (1) There was an inspiration that came from the Muses, as well as an inspiration that came from Apollo. (2)

(1) Homer, Odyseey VIII, 493

(2) Ibid., 488.

Poet's were called "prophets of the Muses;" (3)
 seers, but seers of beauty, and inspired singers who
 knew how to communicate their visions to the heart
 of man. (4)

Small wonder that men have ever been interested
 in the song itself, and have tried to solve
 the secret of that "miracle accomplished

- (3) Cf. Pindar fr. 118
 μαντεύεο μοῖσσι. προφάτρεύσω δ' ἐγώ.
 Plato, Phaedrus 262 D.
 οἱ τῶν Μουσῶν προφῆται
 Theocritus, 16, 29.
 Μουσάων ὕποφῆται

- (4) The song of the poets was considered inspired
 no less than their seeing. The Latin word
Vates expressed both of the senses in which
 inspiration was attributed to the poets.

Cf. also e.g.

Horace, Odes III, 1, 3.

Vosarum sacerdotes.

Euripides in his own way expresses this
 idea. Her. Fur. 673...

οὐ παύσομαι τὰς χάριτας
 Μουσῶν συγκαταμειφνύς
 ἰδίσταν συζυγίαν
 μὴ ζῶν μετ' Ἀμουσίας
 λίει δ' ἐν στεφάνοισιν εἶναι

Of which Gilbert Norwood remarks: Greek Tragedy,
 London, Methuen & Co., 1920, p. 326.

"The Graces and the Muses - such is his better
 way of invoking beauty and Truth, the two
 lined stars of his life-long allegiance."

before our eyes in the open light of day." (5)

Such an attempt is but natural; what more so? The poet's vision is a thing beyond our ken, but here are his words, here his images and melodies; about these surely we can legislate, we can form rules; we can evolve an "art" of song. This was what Aristotle did in the Poetics, and, after Aristotle, the critics of the age of reason.

But, connected with such an analytical study of the mechanics of composition there is a danger that can hardly be avoided, the danger of neglecting the importance of the essential poetry which is to be found only in the vision of the inspired writer. This was the principal error of neo-classicism:

"Stress is placed upon the value of the form. The matter can be known, even commonplace, provided the manner rejuvenates it." (6)

(5) Francis Thompson, "Essay on Coleridge," Works, v. III, p. 132

(6) Legouis and Cazamian, History of English Literature (trans. London & Toronto J.M. Dent & Sons, 1934, p. 763.)

For a century and a half English poetry and English criticism pursued the will-o'-the-wisp of diction and rules, always hoping that some new analysis, some fresh study of the ancient models, would reveal the secret of great writing. The metaphysical school and the classical school, with "turns" of conceit and "turns" of word and imagery, tried to make up for the "frigidness of an inspiration born of reason." (7)

The critics continued to spin out new justifications for the exaggerated attention to the "art" of writing, by appealing to the skill of the ancients, by quoting and re quoting "ut pictura poesis," by brandishing the "imitation" theory of Aristotle and interpreting it so as to make it fit the fashion of the day. (8)

Amid all this darkness there were, of course, flashes of light, both in the world of poetry and the

(7) Ibid.

(8) cf. Babbitt, The New Laocoon, ch. I and II, e. g., (p. 13)
 "There is thus added to the various real and supposed meanings of the word imitation in Aristotle a meaning that is comparatively un-Aristotelian, - the imitation of the models."

world of criticism. In poetry this is not surprising, for the poet is always more or less an unknown quantity, not necessarily in harmony with his age. But even in criticism there were evidences of a return to better things as early as the time of Dryden. Saintsbury, for whom "romanticism" is a land flowing with milk and honey, tells us that Dryden's "method led straight to the Promised Land and his utterances show that he occasionally saw it afar off." (9)

But one cannot read even Dryden for long without feeling that the good seed is growing in very thorny ground. Our admiration for the finest parts of his critical work is partly due to the fact that his conclusions are so at variance with his premises, that he approaches so very close to the truth without quite attaining it. It is evident-- too pitifully evident-- that in Dryden we have a great critical genius wasting his powers on a mass of conventions, rules, hyperboles, hyperbata, and other rhetorical devices. Sometimes

(9) George Saintsbury, "A History of Criticism"
Vol. III p. 9.

his genius almost fights its way to the truth as in his essay "Heroic Poetry and Poetic Licence;" yet even there he does not dare to say that the poet's vision is the reason for the use of imagery, "the height and life of poetry," (10) but only that "sublime subjects ought to be adorned with the sublimest, and consequently often with the most figurative expressions." (11)

Again, "the first happiness of the poet's imagination is properly invention or finding of the thought; the second is fancy, or the variation, deriving, or moulding, of that thought, as the judgment represents it proper to the subject; the third is elocution, or the art of clothing and adorning that thought, so found and varied, in apt, significant and sounding words." (12)

Something, we think, would come of such a theory; but Dryden dashes all our hopes by continuing:

"For the two first of these Ovid is famous among the

(10) John Dryden, Dramatic Essays, Everyman ed., p. 114.

(11) John Dryden, Ibid., p. 117 (Italics mine.)

(12) John Dryden, op. cit., "The Proper Wit of Poetry."
This occurs in his famous passage on "wit-writing," where he says: "The composition of all poems is or ought to be, of wit."
Cf. also op. cit., p. 175, "Musical Drama," "If Wit has truly been defined, 'A propriety of thoughts and words' etc."

poets; for the latter, Virgil" !

Neither is Dryden free from the false notion of "imitation" as a copying not only of nature but of former poets; not even his reading of "Longinus" was enough to save him from that; he writes of the style of "Annus Mirabilis:" "my images are many of them copied from him "(virgil," and the rest are imitations of him. My expressions also are as near as the idioms of the two languages would admit of in translation." (13) Much as we would like to, we cannot absolve even Dryden from the errors that flowed from the exaggerated neo-classical interest in verbal expression.

We may cite just one more instance of Dryden's failure to perceive clearly the nature of the most inspired poetry. It is his only excursion into the field of textual criticism:

"They who would justify the madness of poetry from the authority of Aristotle have mistaken the text and consequently the interpretation; I imagine it to be false read where he says of poetry that it is εἰς φουδὸς ἢ ἀλλυκῶς that it had always somewhat in it either of a genius or of a madman. 'Tis more probable that the original ran thus, that poetry was εἰς φουδὸς οὐδ' ἀλλυκῶς that it belongs to a witty man, but not to a madman!" (14)

(13) Ibid., p. 194.

(14) Ibid., p. 140. "Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy."

Our conclusion must be that Dryden and with him the whole age of neo-classicism "saw the Promised Land" very far off indeed.

Towards the end of the neo-classical period in England the youthful Burke published his famous Essay on the "Sublime and Beautiful," that essay which inspired Lessing and has been heralded as the beginning of a new era in criticism. There is no doubt that in this work Burke cuts away from the false "imitation" theory of his predecessors and lays the foundation of a newer, freer, criticism. But his neo-classical interest in words betrays him into a still worse heresy than any of those that had gone before, - the heresy of Lockian psychology. (15) He tells us that poetry "cannot ... be called an art of imitation." Well and good. But why? Because nothing is an imitation further than as it resembles some other thing and words undoubtedly have no sort of resemblance to the ideas for which they stand." (16)

(15) Cf. "A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful." "Works" Oxford University Press, 1906, vol. I p. 188 (pt. IV sec. XIV):
 "The authority of this great man (Locke) is doubtless as great as that of any man can be."

(16) Ibid., p. 215 (pt. V Sec. VI).

This is surely worse and worse; the inspiration of the Muses has become the black magic of Locke's associationism. Words do not express ideas; in poetry they do not always arouse images. (17) What, we may ask, do they accomplish? Well, some of them excite passions; then, too, we can "combine" them and so "by the addition of well chosen circumstances, give a new life and force to the simple object." (18)

Burke's acceptance of Locke shows him to be a true child of the neo-classical age with its inordinate interest in expression. Only an age that had lost sight of the essential poetry of vision and that was trying to explain everything by an analysis of expression, could have been so easily imposed on by the "ut pictura poesis" theories, the pseudo -- "imitation" theory and, at last, by the theories of Locke. Burke was the child of such an age; he was of the neo-classical tradition. By accepting Locke he broke with the former theories, but at what a price! The introduction of associationism into aesthetics and critical theory

(17) Ibid., p. 213 (pt. V sec. V).

(18) Ibid., p. 217 (pt. V sec. VII).

rendered impossible any truly intellectual theory of vision in England. The psychology of associationism was applied to the poet as well as to the hearer. Vision in its true intellectual sense was no longer to be merely ignored; the very possibility of it was to be denied; it was to be reduced to a poor sort of charlatanry, an affair of "light greens; soft blues; weak whites; pink reds; and violets." (19)

Before the end of the century Gerard was to write that, in the associating power of the imagination, "We shall, on a careful examination, discover the origin of genius... a vigorous construction of the associating principles is sufficient to account for it, however great it be." (20)

(19) op. cit., p. 165. (pt. III sec. XVII).
These are the colours Burke calls
appropriate to Beauty!

(20) Alexander Gerard, "Essay on Genius", 1774,
p. 185,
quoted by Victor M. Hamm, "English Neo-
Classicism: A Study in Confusion",
in Thought, vol. II, (December 1936) p. 539.

Neo-classicism began with ignoring vision and giving its whole attention to problems of composition and expression. It ended, logically enough, by accepting associationism, which is the philosophical negation of intellectual vision, since it is the negation of intellect.

Then, with the turn of the century, came "romanticism" and a new birth of poetry. No other generation in the history of English literature has given us four poets of the calibre of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats. There is in their works a new sense of freshness, and power, and life; an unmistakeable note of authenticity. Diction and rules and formalism no longer assert their tyranny; the new poets do not imitate the images of Virgil; they give us new images culled fresh from the bounty of nature. The beauties, the fire, of Coleridge and Shelley especially cannot be ignored:

"The Ancient Mariner, Christabel, Kubla Khan, Genevieve, are recognized as perfectly unique masterpieces of triumphant utterance and triumphant imagination of a certain kind. They bring down magic to the earth. Shelley has followed it to the skies."

In Shelly

"imagery is not a mere means of expression, not even a mere means of adornment, it is a

delight for its own sake... The dimmest-sparked chip of a conception blazes and scintillates in the subtle oxygen of his mind." (21)

It is hard to remain unconvinced when Shelley and Coleridge tell us that the essence of poetry, that inner vision which men had so long sought to recapture, is to be found in the imagination,

"that synthetic and magical power...which reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposites; the sense of novelty and freshness with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement." (22)

But softly! What is this new faculty of imagination, in what does it differ from the old "image-making" faculty of Aristotle, (23) by the aid of which all former poets had elaborated and adorned their works?

(21) Francis Thompson, op. cit., p. 185.

(22) S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Works, v. III, p. 374, (ch. XIV).

(23) Cf. e. g. S.H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, London, Macmillan, 195, p. 120 and note.
cf., too, Coleridge, Ibid., p. 201, (ch. IV).
"It is not, I own, easy to conceive a more opposite translation of the Greek
 $\varphiαντασία$ than the Latin imaginatio."

That imagination was for the poet largely a faculty of expression; is this imagination that Coleridge means something essentially different? The question is important; if the "imagination" of Coleridge is something new then it may well serve to explain a poet's visions; but if it be the same old faculty glorified, we cannot accept it as a faculty of vision; that would be simply to replace the neo-classical confusion between vision and verbal expression with a new confusion between vision and mental expression or imagery. Moreover it would leave our theory of vision open to an associationism of images no less fatal than the old nominalistic associationism which Burke adopted from Locke.

Coleridge was far too great a genius and knew far too well the true nature of vision to fall into such an error. More than a third of the Biographia is given over to proving that his meaning of imagination is not the old meaning, that Hartley's association theory is false, and that the imagination really is the intellect: (24)

(24) See Appendix C.

"The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation." (25)

This leaves us rather speechless. We had asked if Coleridge's imagination was something new; in truth it was! It was equivalent for Coleridge to that faculty in man which had always been called the intellect. So understood it can be accepted as the faculty of vision.

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- (25) Coleridge, op. cit., p. 363 (ch. XIII).
 Francis Thompson says:
 "If there were a day of judgment against the preventers of poetry, heavy would be the account of that unnamed visitor who interrupted Coleridge in the transcription of his dream-music, and lost to the world for ever the remainder of *Kubla Kahn*. In the other world, we trust, this wretched individual will be condemned eternally to go out of ear-shot when the angels prelude on their harps." Some sort of punishment, too, should be devised for "your affectionate etc." whose letter kept Coleridge from completing his treatment of the "Imagination" in the *Biographia* - because, forsooth, it was entitled "My Literary life and opinions" and any more philosophisings would raise the price a few shillings! op. cit., p. 107.

But that was not the reason why it was accepted by later literary critics. The word imagination was accepted because it was the word Coleridge used and because he brought with him in his poetry his critical credentials. But the meaning that Coleridge gave the word was never accepted. Ruskin alone of the great critical writers dares to ascribe to imagination the functions of intellect. (26) For the rest, the critics speak with the voice of Coleridge but their mind is the mind of Aristotle,-- or worse, of Hartley, or Spencer, or Mill.

It could hardly have been otherwise. Coleridge attempted to introduce into the language a new meaning for a very old word. And the meaning he wished to

(26) At least so far as I am aware. Cf. Ruskin, Modern Painters, Part III, sect. II, ch. 3, no. 4. (Everyman's ed., vol. II, p. 314.) "It may seem to the reader that I am incorrect in calling this penetrating, possession-taking faculty, imagination. Be it so, the name is of little consequence; the Faculty itself, called by what name we will, I insist upon as the highest intellectual power of man." (Italics mine) This part of Modern Painters is, to my mind, one of the peaks of English criticism.

introduce derived from Kant. But England never did accept Kantian philosophy; (27) English philosophy remained bravely sensistic and empirical throughout the century. The result was that the word imagination became a sort of undefined synonym for vision or genius. It was qualified by adjectives, "lyrical," "dramatic," "penetrative," "romantic," "creative," and men felt that they were really explaining something by these phrases. (28) But all the while what men really meant by "imagination" was the "image-making faculty." The confusion could not have been more hopeless. The old faculty of

(27) It is worthy of note that even Berkeley, who is the only "idealistic" English philosopher, never even dreamed of making imagination a faculty of intellect. cf. "Hylas & Philonous" Works, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1901, p. 404: "This much seems manifest that sensible things are only to be perceived by sense, or represented by the imagination." (Italics mine)

(28) Each of these adjectives would repay study. Taken together they show conclusively that critics were worried by the new dignity of the word and its still present age-old connotations. Arnold even speaks of the "imaginative reason!" Mr. I.A. Richards in Principles of Literary Criticism lists six distinct senses in which the word is used, and does not exhaust the possibilities. London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1925.

"image-making" which had been for the older poets a faculty of expression was glorified and exalted into a faculty of vision. (29) The old neo-classical error of a too great interest in expression was reenacted in romanticism on a slightly different level. The neo-classical critics had attended too closely to diction and rules, the romantic critics attended too closely to images and imaginings. Real intellectual vision was largely neglected and the end of the century saw the

- (29) It is noteworthy that the nineteenth century was mainly interested in lyrical inspiration. But even in lyric poetry it may be argued that the "romanticists" lost something by identifying vision and imagination. Compare for example Coleridge's
- "The one red leaf, the last of its clan
That dances as often as dance it can
Hanging so light, and hanging so high
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky."
- Christabel

With Sappho's

οἶον τὸ λυκόμελον ἐρέεθεται ἱκρῶ ἐπ' ὕσδω
ἱκρον ἐπ' ἱκροτάτῳ, λελάθοντο δὲ μαλεδρόπῃς
οὐ μὲν ἐκλελέθοντ' ἀλλ' οὐκ ἐδύναντ' ἐπίκεσθαι.

They are perfect parallels but in the Greek the imagery is subordinated to vision: οἶον Sappho says and we know that her picture is the expression of a lovelier beauty still, the beauty, perhaps, of an unwed maid "like a young palm by the altar of Apollo." (Od. VI, 163.) Coleridge's leaf remains a leaf that "looks up at the sky" but Sappho ends on a note of human longing.

association of images and "impressionism" creep into critical theory. "Indeed, we are still living in an atmosphere of associationism. One of the most widely heralded and brilliantly written books in the field of contemporary criticism, Professor Lowes' "Road to Xanadu," reposes on associationistic principles." (30) Romanticism like neo-classicism has come full cycle and we are once more face to face with the problem of intellectual vision.

Of course, there have been, once again, flashes of light amid all this pseudo-illumination. The criticism of the school of Arnold, for example, is not at all in the romantic tradition. But men's minds, if I mistake not, are still "romantic". The humanism of Babbitt and More, to cite an instance, is felt by most to be too reactionary and too unaware of the deeper significance of "romantic" tendencies. Criticism has not yet achieved that higher synthesis which men feel should eventually be achieved, if we are to have anything like a universal standard of value. I hope in

(30) Victor Hamm, op. cit., p. 388.

the next chapter to give some far-off glimpses of that "promised land" of universal values in criticism.

But first it will be necessary here to state my own views about the proper function of imagination and verbal expression in the communication of the poet's vision. I shall use "imagination" here in the old, clear, simple sense of the "image-making faculty."

Imagination, then, is the faculty by means of which the poet ordinarily begins the projection of his vision into the world outside his own mind. With the vision of the ideal bright within him he elaborates by his imagination that fair imagining which most perfectly embodies the features of the ideal; then by words he gives the image its life in the world of men. Men coming upon it in the poet's words begin to see something of that vision which it bodies forth; they are raised out of themselves by the beauty of its form and in their minds arises another vision, another intuitus, not unlike that of the poet. This vision of ours, which we call aesthetic experience, is made possible by the incarnation in words of the poet's vision, and that incarnation is due ultimately to the imagination of the poet. Not that the incarnation is a perfect embodiment of the poet's vision; not even the poet's mental image

embodies that vision perfectly. Francis Thompson tells us that there are three stages or processes in the artist's creation, the "ideal," "the mental image of the ideal," and "the external or objective reproduction of the mental image in material form." These "lessen in perfection as they become material; the ideal is the most perfect; the mental image less perfect; the objective image least perfect." (31)

Clearly it is only a truly great ideal, a very perfect beauty, that will survive in the finished statue, or in the melody, or on the canvas, or in the "word-painting" of the poet. This ideal, this pax formae, this beauty which is the object of vision, is never perfectly mirrored even in the poet's own imagination: "the mental expression" (in the poet's imagination) "cannot represent all the qualities of the conception" (the vision). (32) Yet the greatest poets by more inspired imaginings of more inspired visions and by mastery of language do kindle in the souls of their hearers something of their own divine fire. In this

(31) Francis Thompson, op. cit., p. 84.

(32) Ibid. p. 86.

they imitate the Divine Artist who, Thompson tells us,

"reveals His conception to man in the material forms of Nature...An ideal wakes in the Omnipotent Painter; and straightway over the eternal dikes rush forth the flooding tides of night, the blue of heaven ripples into stars; Nature, from Alp to Alpine flower, rises lovely with the betrayal of the Divine thought. An ideal wakes in the Omnipotent Poet; and there chimes the rhythm of an ordered universe. An ideal wakes in the Omnipotent Musician; and Creation vibrates with the harmony, from the palpitating throat of the bird to the surges of His thunder as they burst along the roaring strand of Heaven; nay, as Coleridge says, 'The silent air is music slumbering on her instrument.' Earthly beauty is but heavenly beauty taking to itself flesh. Yet, though this objective presentment of the Divine Ideal be relatively more perfect than any human presentment of a human ideal; yet is even the Divine embodiment transcendently inferior to the Divine Ideal." (53)

What wonder that the poets, who have to express their visions by the dim picturing of the imagination and the weakness of language, have been thought to share divinity. This is the truest sense and the noblest of the phrase "imitation of Nature;" the artist, who has attained to a more perfect vision, imitates nature's "betrayal of the Divine thought," by his own imaginings, and impressing the form of the image on the external medium, leads others to "see visions and dream dreams," not dreams of unreality but of the

reality which "transcends in beauty the image as body is transcended by soul." (34) When such is the artist's "imitation," then the very form of beauty herself, the pax formae which the artist has known, takes flesh and lives among men. Then the countenance of perfect beauty shining through the material form wins our love and affection: the work of art is as Coleridge defined it "forma formans per formam formatam translucens." (35)

Strictly speaking however it is not the imagination which gives to the work of art its unity of form. The imagination does in a sense bestow that unity, but only in so far as it works under the guidance of the higher intellectual vision, the *intuitus*. Many imagined words and thoughts and actions go to the making of Achilles, but the concept of his character in the mind of Homer is more than the sum of all of these; it exists only in the fierce light of Homer's intellectual vision. When we say that Homer had a

(34) op. cit., p. 85.

(35) Coleridge, Critique on Portman, Works, v. III, p. 563. Coleridge quotes this phrase, but I have not been able to trace it.

"mental image" of Achilles' greatness we are in danger of ascribing to the imagination a unity of vision to which only the intellect can attain. (36) Really there is no single mental image of the vision; there is a group of images fused into new unity because of their relation to the single beauty of the intellectual vision.

Speaking of his first inspiration Beethoven, for example, uses terms of knowledge, of power, of intellectual intuition:

"You will ask me how my ideas come. I cannot tell you with certainty. They come uncalled for-- directly, indirectly. I can grasp them with my hands in the open air, in the woods, when walking in the silence of the night, in the early morning, excited by moods which the poet puts into words, and I into tones, which roar around me until I see them at last in notes before me." (37)

But when Beethoven describes the expressing of this idea he describes it in terms of selection and imagination:

(36) Cf. e.g., Castiello S.J., Jaime, A Humane Psychology of Education. N.Y., Sheed & Ward, 1936, p.77.

(37) Ibid., p. 57. quoted from Turner, W.J. "Beethoven: The Search for Reality," N.Y., 1927, p. 194.

"I carry my ideas about me for a long time before I write them down. My memory is so tenacious that I am certain never to forget a theme which I have once worked out, not even after years. I alter a great deal, throw away and begin again frequently, until I am contented. Then begins the general working in my head in every direction, in height, breadth and depth; and because what I want is known to me, so the underlying idea never leaves me but grows and mounts. I hear and see the picture in its full dimensions stand before me like a cast, and there only remains the work of writing it down." (38)

. These two passages of Beethoven should, I think, become a locus classicus for further investigations into the problem of vision and imagination. Similar passages are numerous in modern authors, because of the present day interest in psychology. But most of the important ones which I have so far read prove quite clearly that the function of imagination is to elaborate the beauties

(38) Quoted by Castiello, op.cit., p. 64 from Turner op. cit., p. 193. Castiello divides the creative process into four parts which he calls "contact with reality...condensation of experience... intuition... and revision, criticism, and elaboration." The above passage Castiello interprets as referring to the "condensation" which precedes the "intuition" (vision, intuitus sapientiae.) But it seems to me that a better interpretation would include this passage under Castiello's fourth category, in which the imagination and (musical) diction play their part. I am so interpreting the words here, the more so since the above quotation ends with the words "...there only remains the work of writing it down."

of the projected material form, which is to embody the splendid perfection of the vision. This I believe is the true function of imagination in the sense I have described; it elaborates to a full vivid expression the external form until such time as that form becomes an adequate medium for conveying the meaning of the vision. The workings of the poet's imagination are usually elaborate enough to be analyzed, handled by the reader; his vision can be apprehended only as he himself apprehended it, in a moment of insight. The whole purpose of his imaginative picturing is to lead the listener to such an insight. It is largely his imagination which is the preparation for our vision. The origins of his vision are hardly the subject matter of our critical study. Those he is not attempting to convey; his poem is meant to take us only so far as his vision itself. Suffice it to say that perhaps the psychologists are right in their theories about the origin of the poet's vision; yet that is the province of psychology. The literary critic need only be interested in the fact that the pax formae in all its perfection seems to break from the blue at the first glance when the poet is wise and truly inspired. And even in the supremest flights of imagination we can distinguish the vision as something more beautiful and

more lovable, something not fully contained in the imaginative expression, and not really there, a "forma formans per formam formatam translucens" for those who have eyes to see.

The more perfect is the imagined beauty, the more surely it raises our minds to the contemplation of that vision which gave it birth; yet is the vision distinct from the imagining, as when the psalmist tells us:

"Colles mundi inconvati sunt
itineribus aeternitatis suae."

We come next to the verbal expression, the words and metre and melody, with which the poet shapes the external work of art. They are the stuff of which poetry is made, the objective medium, corresponding to the marble of the sculptor and the palette of the painter. Thus their primary function is the vivid embodying of the imagined form. Theoretically, at least, the poet's verbal expression is twice removed from the reality of vision; it gives us, as Thomson says, only an imperfect embodiment of the "mental image."

Yet because of the very nature of the poet's medium, because of the affinity of the intellect and the word, because as "Longinus" tells us "Beautiful words

are in truth the peculiar light of thought," (39)
 it is possible for the poet at times to disengage with
 the imagined form and to communicate the fire of his
 vision by the sheer power of the word. These
 "miracles of language" (40) happen at rare intervals; yet,
 when they do, we feel that human language has torn
 aside the veil and allowed us to participate directly
 in that vision wherein one sees and believes.

"Perché lo lo ino lo, l'arte, e l'uso
 c'h'hai. Si nol direi che mai s'ha finasc,
 Ma creder possi, e al veder si brami!" (41)

Only the great poets however, and they not
 frequently, have this gift of "lo made parole," (42)
 and they have it only because their wisdom and their
 vision is surpassing mortal like that of Catrissa.
 Sappho, for example can dare this simple magic:

ἡρώμαν μὲν ἔγω σέθεν Ἄτθι πάλαι πότρε.

(39) "Longinus" ch. XXI, 1.

(40) Cf. J. V. Michail, Lectures on Greek Poetry,
 p. 151.

(41) Dante, Paradiso, London, J. Dent Sons,
 1932, 1, 45.

(42) Dante, op. cit., Argomento XXXIII, 100.

(43) Sappho fr. 33.

and Catullus attains it in that verse of haunting pathos,

"Atque in crebris frater, reatque vale!" (44)

But it is more characteristic of epic poets and dramatists, and flows from that "absolute vision" which Theodore Watts, in his famous article on Poetry, contrasts with the "relative vision" of the lyric writers. (1) One beautiful instance of it is to be found in the words of Penelope:

τοῦ ποτὲ μνησέσθαι οἶμαι ἐν περ ὀνείρῳ (46)
there are dreams of others in the two Homeric poems.

Dante himself knows how to arouse in us that "desire" for truer vision and deeper understanding, as when he speaks - oh so simply - of his ascent to the heaven of the sun,

"Ed io era come .". (47)

Shakespeare, like the Greek tragedians, is wonderful in his use of these simple phrases: (48)

(44) Catullus CIII.

(45) Encyclopædia Brit., 1911, "Poetry."

(46) Homer, Iliad, III, 11.

(47) Dante Div. Com., "Paradise", 1.

(48) Shakespeare, Macbeth, I, 1.

"Wake Duncan with thy knocking!
I would thou could'st!"

As Mackail says of this sort of writing, "One hardly notices the words; they have become transparent; it seems as if the poet who could do these things with these words could do anything with any words." (49) Sophocles and Shakespeare are, according to Mackail the only masters of this style. But surely this is to limit too far the power of the poets. I should say there are many besides. In fact among the Greeks, with their great love of directness, this power is not uncommon. (50) No poet, perhaps, has ever used sheer mastery of language with more intense effect than Simonides in his epitaph for the heroes of Thermopylae.

ὦ Ζεῦ ἄγρειλον Λακεδαιμονίοις ὅτι τῆδε
 κείμεθα τοῖς κείνων ῥήμασι πειθόμενοι.

Still Mackail is right in thinking that such

(49) J. W. Mackail, op. cit., p. 150.

(50) Cf. R. W. Livingstone, The Greek Genius and Its Bearing to Us, London, Oxford University Press, 1904, ch. I 1.

a gift is rare; even in Sophocles and Shakespeare such miracles are infrequent; no man may speak the language of the gods for long. (51)

We had best retrace our steps and consider more in detail that other more humble function of the poet's language, the expression of the "mental image" of his ideal in word and metre and melody. We have already said that this expression is necessarily imperfect; but there are degrees of imperfection. Here too there are heights not anyone can scale, and laurels, but not for every brow. The competition is keen, for imagery is ordinarily the direct subject matter of poetical composition, and they who succeed in expressing it beautifully and vividly are masters of their art. Even when the imagery is, so to speak, pure imagery and not the embodiment of

(51) I may mention that there is room for a great deal of difference of opinion about expressions as simple as those here treated. It may be that not all of the examples I have cited will appeal to my readers. But it is, I think, clear what is meant, and each may choose others for himself. Norwood, for instance, cites the speech of Oedipus in the Oedipus Coloneus (vv. 607 ff.) as an example of this sort of writing. But I am here limiting myself to verses in which no imagery whatever is used.

a higher vision, still the perfect compelling expression of it is a triumph of language. Such a triumph, for example, is Kubla Khan; it is so very like great poetry--if only we could believe that the imagery were a symbol at least of something above and beyond itself.

Now in what does the excellence of Kubla Khan consist? First of all in the use of vivid words for the expression of the picture:

"And here were gardens bright with
sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense bearing
tree."

This choice of words becomes the more important the more exalted the vision which the image bodies forth. Thus where Thompson writes: (52)

"And thou--what needest with thy tribes
black tents
Who hast the red pavillion of my heart,"

we feel no other words would do quite so well for the expression of that image. But when the writer of the Dies Irae sings from a heart bursting with love,

"Recordare, Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuae viae
Ne me perdas illa die,"

we know that that is the only word of all the words

(52) Francis Thompson, "Selected Poems"
London, Jonathan Cape, 1908. "Arab Love Song."

in the Latin tongue.

Besides this choice of the vivid word, there is also exemplified in *Kubla Khan* the excellent adaptation of metre for the imaginative expression. The question of metre perhaps deserves special treatment; but to enter upon the problem now would carry us too far afield. For present purposes we merely note the fact that words grouped in musical rhythms undoubtedly help to intensify the lights and shadows of the picture. In great poets words and metre unite in a sort of higher unity for the expression of the poetic image. Homer is past master of this use of metre and melody:

οἷη περ φύλλων γενεή, ποίη δὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν
 φύλλα τὰ μὲν τ' ἀνεμος, χαμᾶσις χέει ἄλλα δὲ θ' ὕλη
 τηλεθόωρα φύει, ἔαρος δ' ἐπιγίγνεται ὥρη
 ὥς ἀνδρῶν γενεή ἥ μὲν φύει ἥ δ' ἀπολήγει

(53)

We may believe that Homer shaped with special care the rhythms of that simile, and loved with a special love the vision deep and within the imagery.

(53) Homer, *Iliad*, VI, 146 ff.

A third excellence of poetic expression that we note in *Kubla Khan* is the use of alliteration and the counterpoint of vowels and consonants. Stevenson, in his essay "On the Art of Writing English," has an interesting analysis of the effect of consonant melodies in the following description from "Anthony and Cleopatra:"

"The barge she sat in like a burnished throne
burn'd on the water; the poop was beaten gold;
Purple the sails, and so perfumed that
The winds were love-sick with them." (54)

It is evident enough that this sort of incidental harmony does much to heighten the vividness of the imagery. Homer again is magnificent in this, as he is in everything:

οὐτ' ἀνέμοισι τιυάσσεται οὔτε ποτ' ὄμ βρω
δεύεται οὔτε χιῶν ἐπιπίδναται ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἰὺρη
πέπταται ἀνέφελος λευκή δ' ἐπιδέδρομεν αἶψα
(55)

Am I wrong in thinking that the substitution of
ἀργή for λευκή and of αὖρη for αἶψα would

(54) Shakespeare, Anthony and Cleopatra. II, 1.

(55) Homer, Od., VI, 43 ff.

lessen the effect of that marvellous description? The point may seem minor; yet, the greatest poets are not above exaggerating consonant effects deliberately. (56) Moreover an amazing number of the most famous verses will be found to possess this melody of sounds:

"Sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt." (57)

"L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle." (58)

"Methought I heard a voice cry, Sleep
no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep!" (59)

These few observations indicate sufficiently for our purpose the true place of diction, metre, and melody as an expression of poetic imagery. We may now summarize our account of the poetic process.

Our belief is that, given the vision, the poet ordinarily shapes with his imagination a

(56) cf. Euripides, Medea, 476,
Sophocles, Oedipus Rex, 371.

(57) Virgil, Aeneid, I, 462.

(58) Last line of the Divina Commedia of Dante.

(59) Shakespeare, Macbeth, Act II, Sc. II.

beautiful form; then he tries to express that imagined form objectively by word and metre and melody. Occasionally, however, the greatest poets dare to essay the direct communication of their vision by the sheer power of "le nude parole."

In either case the one important thing is the communication of the vision, the intuitus sapientiae, the perfect beauty and wisdom that his mind has seen and that the mind of the reader "di veder si brami."

"This," the great poets seem to say to us, "is the reason for all our beauties of imagery and phrase and metre and melody, that you may see the things which we have seen, the visions whose beauty stirred within us the desire to communicate them with you. Sometimes we embody this beauty, this pax formae, which we have seen in images, and sculptured words, or colored words, or melodies, or in our great cathedral-like tragedies and epic poems; sometimes in very truth and not in imagery we express these secret visions by a higher miracle of language; sometimes, too, that you may not tarry by the way and miss the goal of wisdom, we awaken in you a longing for perfect vision by our "half said things" and by our silences, the silence of Prometheus on the mountain

crag, the silence of Ajax amid the mighty dead, the
 silence that followed after Duncan slain, the silence
 of Nausicaa's *μνήσῃ ἐμεῖ* ;
 this power of the thing unsaid is ours, as well as
 the power of the word, and it too we have learned of
 the Divine artist and the silence of the Word of God."

CHAPTER IV.

Among literary critics of the present day there is a growing restlessness. First of all the suspicion is abroad that the "romanticism" of the last hundred and fifty years was not necessarily right just because neo-classicism had been proved wrong. Babbitt and the Humanists have led the revolt against romanticism and have pointed out the insufficiency of "romantic" subjectivism and the "lower spontaneity." (1) But most modern writers are keenly alive to the history of critical theories and are afraid of being swept by the humanists into a purely reactionary movement. Many hesitate to follow Babbitt in his appeal to the "limiting and circumscribing law of form;" (2) The phrase sounds too much like a watchword for a new neo-classical reaction, and literary critics are a bit weary of reactions. Some writers like T.S. Eliot wish to

(1) e.g. Irving Babbitt, The New Laokoon, p. 224.
 "In short, Signor Croce is an apostle of spontaneity, but it is the lower spontaneity, - the spontaneity of instinct and not that of insight."

(2) Babbitt, op. cit., p. 226.

forget the terms Classicism and Romanticism, "terms which inflame political passions and tend to prejudice our conclusions." (3) But Classicism and Romanticism have bulked too large for the last three centuries to be dismissed lightly. Literary criticism simply must reckon with them and the reckoning is weighty. Neoclassicism failed and, it would seem, "romanticism" has failed. But it is useless to maintain that either was a total failure. Dangerous though the terms may be, most critics would like to pierce through to the real meaning of classic and romantic, to find what truth there is in each of them, and to reconcile the two in some sort of higher synthesis. Herbert Read, for example, puts the problem quite definitely:

"In a broad sense my theory of poetic form would have been classical, but when I stand up squarely to the traditional terms of the classical theory, and attempt to relate them to my experience, I find there is no application - my experience cuts across the classical-romantic categorization." (4)

This, it seems to me, is the basic problem of

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- (3) T.S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, p. 129.
- (4) Herbert Read, Form in Modern Poetry, London, Sheed and Ward, 1932, p. 3.

modern criticism, the problem of finding a new critical vantage point which will be neither classical nor romantic, and yet will allow the critic to see what is good in both traditions. In attempting to solve this old problem of the classic and romantic, modern critics have wisely attempted to probe beneath the external forms of the two traditions. They have tried to discover what lies behind the classical love of rules and the romantic spontaneity and love of imagery. That is to say they admit, implicitly at least, the unsatisfactory character of the critical approach of the last three centuries. As Premond says:

"The old method having plainly failed, we think we are likely to be more successful - and certainly we cannot well be less - by inquiring no longer into what a poem is made of, but how it is made; in seeking out no longer the mystery of the poem, but the mystery of the poet." (5)

This is in truth the attitude of most modern critics, an attitude intensified by the unflinching present day interest in psychology and psychoanalysis. Pick up almost any modern critical work and you will find it deals largely with the mystery of the poet.

(5) Henri remond, Prière et Poésie,
"Introduction" P.A.I.

The theories of Read, Gilby, Lowes, Dickinson, and Richards, to cite but a few, are almost wholly concerned with the psychology of inspiration. Gilby, for example, tells us in his introduction:

"In the following pages we must leave on one side discussions as to the nature of beauty or the function of art, in order to confine our attention to that human activity which appears to break through types to things, to pass beyond the abstract to the concrete and to enjoy an immediacy beyond the range of deliberation." (6)

Theories of poetic knowledge and inspiration are the order of the day. No criticism is considered complete unless it advocates some theory of poetic vision, unless it attempts to describe or explain the poetic insight which lies deep hid beneath the "traditional terms" of classicism and romanticism. Modern schools of criticism are really distinguished by their view of poetic inspiration, by their attributing more or less of intellect or sensation or mysticism to the vision of the poet. Thus we have a "new" problem in criticism and a new alignment of critics superseding the old classico-romantic alignment,

(6) Thomas Gilby, C.P., Poetic Experience, London, Sheed and Ward, 1934, p. 3.

Those critics who minimize the part which intellect plays in vision, critics like Richards and to a lesser extent Lowes, we may call the extreme Leftists.

Those who exaggerate the part of the intellect, like Croce, we may call the critics of the extreme Right.

In between we have those of leftist tendencies like Maritain, Gill and Gilby, who for one reason or another, - because they are interested in poetry as an "art," or because they are afraid of intuitions, or because they have bound to their soil with hoops of steel the old dictum, "nil in intellectu quod non prius in sensibus" -- bind the poet more or less severely to the material and the concrete and the particular. Watkin, on the other hand, is a critic with rightist leanings, though he is still far from the position of Bremond. These are somewhat rough divisions that I have made and there are many passages in all these writers that would give the lie to such divisions. But the reason for this is that this new severance of critical theories is not as yet fully codified, and the necessity of taking a definite, consistent, stand as regards poetic vision is not fully appreciated. Hence many critics whose basic attitude is either intellectual or sensistic allow themselves to make admissions inconsistent with their fundamental

theory.

Finally among modern critics there is the always torturing problem of absolute - or relatively absolute - standards of values. This is a common and ever present problem. Strangely enough the critics of the extreme left like Richards insist on a "theory of values," though they practically deny the true intellectual quality of vision. No less strangely critics like Croce who so elevate the poet's intellect as to make it a world in itself, still as critics admit and insist on the validity of the judgments of other intellects. A century of romanticism in literature and of idealism in philosophy has not shaken men's belief in the right of the critic to criticize. Coleridge with his usual perspicacity long ago indicated the basic common-sense reason for this belief.

"No person of common reflection demands even in feeling, that what tastes pleasant to him ought to produce the same effect on all living beings; but every man does and must expect and demand the universal acquiescence of all intelligent beings in every conviction of his understanding." (7)

(7) Coleridge, "Fragment of an Essay on Taste," Works, v. IV, p. 370.

That is certainly the belief of most modern critics and it is a heartening relief for one setting out for the first time on the stormy sea of literary criticism, qui fragilem truci commisit pelago ratem.

There are then, as I see it, three major problems that the present day critic must face: the problem of "classicism and romanticism," the problem of poetic vision, and the problem of standards of value.

The theory of intellectual vision that I have proposed seems to answer sufficiently well the first and second of these problems. If we say that a great inspiration or vision is an intuitus sapientiae we take a definitely forthright view of vision itself and at the same time allow for what is good in the two great poetical traditions of romanticism and classicism. When we say that the vision is an intuitus we mean that it is perceived by the intellect as distinct from the reason or the senses; when we say that it is an intuitus sapientiae, we mean that reason and experience must create in the soul that gift of wisdom which makes vision possible. Ours is at once a classical theory, because it demands a vision guided by wisdom and also a romantic theory, because it demands that

the vision be an immediate intuition. Such a theory will give the critic a vantage point not so exalted as Bremond's nor so humbling as Maritain's, but a firm central position from which he can look from end to end mightily and dispose all things sweetly. Moreover, most of the great poetry of the world would seem to be less mystical than Bremond would have us believe, yet more intellectual than Richards or even Maritain would consider possible. That is to say, the happy fusion of intuition and wise knowledge, which we here maintain, is in harmony with most of the great poetry - and the great art - of

the world. (8)

(8)

As regards painting, for example, Sir Joshua Reynolds indicates clearly in his famous discourses the need for these two elements. Thus he says of intuition: (*Italics mine*) "There is in the commerce of life, as in art, a sagacity which is far from being contradictory to right reason, and is superior to any occasional exercise of that faculty; which supercedes it; and does not wait for the slow progress of deduction, but goes at once, by what appears a kind of intuition, to the conclusion." Discourses, London, John Sharpe, 1720, (XIII, p. 90.)

".... the subordinate parts of our art, and perhaps of other arts, expand themselves by a slow and progressive growth; but those which depend on a native power of imagination generally burst forth at once in fulness of beauty. Of this, Homer probably and Shakespeare more assuredly, are signal examples. Michael Angelo possessed the poetical part of our art in a most eminent degree." (XV, p. 148) But Reynolds is no less insistent on the classical love of truth: "The general objection to the introduction of philosophy into the regions of taste, is that it checks and restrains the flights of the imagination and gives that timidity, which an over-carefulness not to err or act contrary to reason is likely to produce. It is not so; fear is neither reason nor philosophy. The true spirit of philosophy, by giving knowledge, gives a manly confidence, and substitutes rational firmness in the place of vain presumption." (VII, p. 142). (*Italics mine*)

But if all this theorizing be true, what are the consequences when we come to criticize a poem? How should we set about the work of literary criticism, and what are to be our standards of excellence? First of all it is not quite the same with poetry as with the other arts (or crafts) which Eric Gill treats so masterfully. Frequently enough, after the first glance at a statue, we can go on to consider whether it is a "good" statue; we can after the first exhilarating view of the Parthenon or the temple of Neptune or the rose window at Chartres, go on to the consideration of their architectural rightness and reasonableness. Our knowledge of the craftsmanship and technical niceties is not likely to diminish our vision; the statue, the painting, the temple, remain there before us unmistakable in their peace and perfection. But it is far otherwise with a great poem. We cannot begin at once with a consideration of the poem as a work of art. A poem has first of all to be understood. More than that, the melody and imagery of it must be allowed to work their effect on us, and our minds have to be brought into harmony with the mind of the poet. Only when this is done can we be reasonably certain that the vision of the poet has been manifested to us. It is only

after a sympathetic reading and rereading of a poem that we begin to understand it in the way that we understand a statue or a painting at the first glance. We cannot, then, on our first acquaintance with a poem allow ourselves to be distracted by considerations of verbal technique, or stage-craft, or metre, or imagery. First of all, and beyond all else, we have to see the ideal beauty which the poet is trying to make us see. And this vision of ours, this seeing, is no longer the single simple vision that is conveyed by the peace of a great melody, or the spiritual aspiration of Chartres, or the purity and joy of an Angelico, or the power of a Michelangelo. It is a vision that the great poet leads us to surely and carefully with all the resources at his command. It is as sure and certain a thing, as inevitable, as the clearness of outline of a statue of Pheidias. But it is only the great poets who have such visions; only they who can so communicate them. And even they demand of us a generous and "uncritical" first hearing. We cannot arrive at the vision by an analysis of the technique. The technique, the artistry, is not meant to be analyzed; it is meant merely to lead us to the vision. We must allow the poet's words

and melody and imagery to work their will upon us, believing that there is a magic in them that will lead us to see what the poet wanted us to see - else we shall never be able to criticize the poetry because we shall never have known it.

"In writing about Sophocles," says Mackail, "critics are perpetually evading the point..... They slide off into discussions of his verbal technique, the remarkable way in which he brings the vocabulary and structure of his poetry close alongside of prose; or of his stage craft, the adroit mechanism of his drama; or still oftener, of his ethics and theology. But these are not his poetry; and it is by no means easy to keep the eye steady on the poetry." (9)

What then, is this poetry which we are seeking out and how shall we know when we have found it? We have already said what it is; it is the vision of a man inspired by wisdom. We have just now indicated the first steps along the way to its discovery. The first task in criticism must be to set aside all distracting considerations and try to see the poem, to see the visions of perfection, the pax formae which the poet is trying to communicate. Our next

(9) J.W. Mackail, Lectures on Greek Poetry, p. 147.

primary consideration must be to judge from the effect of the poetry on ourselves whether it is inspiring, that is to say whether it produces in us that immediacy of vision and its accompanying joy which we look for in what we call "inspired" and 'Longinus' called *ἡ ψοῦς*. (10) This first judgment of ours is of course, necessarily somewhat subjective because its purpose is to evaluate the romantic element in poetical inspiration, the intuitus of the poet. Yet the subjectiveness of this judgment has been very much exaggerated both by those who would make it the supreme thing in criticism and who glory in its being subjective, and by those who are afraid of it and would lead criticism back to saner and more "rational" paths. The fact is that a "man of intelligence, well versed in literature" will recognize easily and

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- (10) "Longinus," VII, 2. "For, as if instinctively, our soul is uplifted by the true sublime; it takes a proud flight, and is filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard." (Translation by Rhys Roberts) There can be little doubt that "sublime" is an unhappy translation; but it is consecrated by tradition and has become familiar. For my part, I would suggest, "Inspired writing" as the best rendering.

surely that sort of great poetry "which leaves in the mind more than the words seem to convey, which it is difficult or rather impossible to withstand, the memory of which is strong and hard to efface." (11) Such a recognition is not purely subjective, not a mere giving way to "feeling" or the "lower spontaneity." It is conditioned by a man's knowledge and admiration for the admittedly great poems of the world; it is guided and directed by a man's instinctive sympathy with artistic perfection. (12) Yet in spite of the traditional and objective elements which help to shape one's critical opinion, this, our primary judgment, must after all deal with the

(11) "Longinus," loc. cit., 2.

(12) This, I take it, is the true meaning of Arnold's "touchstones." Their real helpfulness lies not in a formal comparison of them with other poetry; rather they are meant to develop our critical instinct, to form in us a habit of judging rightly about the style and matter of poetry. "If we are thoroughly penetrated by their power, we shall find that we have acquired a sense enabling us, whatever poetry may be laid before us, to feel the degree in which a high poetical quality is present or wanting there." Essays in Criticism, (second series), "The Study of Poetry," p. 14, Macmillan "Caravan Lib." (Italics mine)

effect of the poem on us. We have to decide from these effects whether or not the poem is truly inspirational - whether it proceeds from an intuitus on the part of the poet. Obviously there will be many who will be unwilling to accept a judgment of this sort. To such we can only say "Taste and see," and we shall have to console ourselves with the reflection that there have always been just critical opinions unacceptable to many. But, more than that, it must be clear that, subjective or not, this judgment must be faced if we are to decide as to the greatness of a poem. A great poem as we have seen must proceed from an intuitus of some sort; nothing else will explain the age-old belief that the poet is a seer, the persistence of the romantic tradition, the sense of joy and deeper understanding that comes to one on reading the "great" poetry of past ages. If that be so, sooner or later we must, if we are to judge the greatness of a poem, face the question as to whether or not it is the sort of poem which could have proceeded from nothing less than such an immediate vision. This question we repeat is primary and necessary in criticism. If our decision be wrong it will be so not because of any defect of critical method; the decision must be made. It

will be wrong only because of our defect as critics.

Thus far, then, we have tried to behold the vision which the poet is attempting to convey and we have argued from the nature of the vision produced in us to the presence or absence of an immediate intuitus on the part of the poet. Let us suppose that we have decided from the effect of the poem on ourselves that the poet has had such an immediate vision. The next thing we shall have to consider is the content of our vision. Have we any reason to suppose that the poet can communicate his vision so clearly that we may feel sure that our vision is substantially the same as his? It seems to me that we have every reason to suppose it as regards great poets. The universal esteem in which great poetry is held argues unmistakably to such a communication. For, evidently, the universal agreement of men about the great poets of the world, cannot be the result of feelings or emotions; it must be the result of the only thing which is unchangeable in man, the intellectual perception of truth. But that in turn is directly due to the poem, and the poem is the result of the poet's intellectual insight and vision. The obvious conclusion is that the great poets do succeed in communicating their vision. (13)

If, then, we read a great poem as it should be read, as the poet intended that we should read it, we can be sure of this, that through the poem the poet will have communicated to us the intellectual content of his vision. This certainty suggests the next step in our critical consideration. It is not enough, evidently, that we should simply accept the glorious fact that a great poem does communicate to us something of the poet's own insight, something of what Croce would call "lo spirito del poeta." No, this immediate perception of ours, this vision of beauty, which the poet saw and which we now see, must be judged in the light of wisdom. We must decide whether the intellectual content of our vision is the stuff of which great poetry is made. Our first judgment as to the intuitus of the poet was subjective and had to do with the manner of the poet's communication. This, our second and final judgment, is based on the eternal laws of truth, and has to do with the knowledge which has been communicated. If we find that a poem produces in us a view of the world and human life that is in accord with those laws, then we maintain that the poet's

intuitus was an intuitus sapientiae and hence a true vision, not an illusion or a mere subjective fancy. We are in the same position as a theologian, who, having felt the unction and fervour of a spiritual treatise and having decided that it is the sort of thing a true mystic might write, goes on to consider it in the light of dogmatic truth. But "certain enthusiasts" who "hailed Croce as the long-awaited Messiah of aesthetics" deny that we have any similar right to test the poet's "expression" in the light of wisdom. (14) Croce himself seems indeed to say "thus far thou shalt go and no farther." At the most his theories would allow us to find a niche for our poet in the "history of the human spirit." Babbitt, rightly, objects to this view and wants us to recognize in beauty besides the "expansive" element an "element of form that is felt rather as limiting and circumscribing law." But Babbitt does not show sufficiently that this limiting element is the habitus intellectualis of wisdom in the poet; he is too interested in the old war of "classicism and romanticism"

(14) cf. Babbitt, The New Laokoon, pp. 223-4.

and speaks of form in terms of rule and precept and external legislation; it is not plain from what these words convey that the two elements "should stand toward one another not as clashing antinomies but as reconciled opposites." (15) Signor Croce, on the other hand, when he speaks as a literary critic and not as a theorist often engages in discussions of the wisdom of a poet's views. In this, though inconsistent with himself, he is merely following the example of all great critics. (16) Thus, for example, he attributes Shakespeare's unpopularity in the last

(15) Babbitt, op. cit., p.231. Babbitt's position will be clearer if we note what immediately follows. He likes seeing this reconciliation in the phrase of Coleridge, "In the concrete, beauty is the union of the shapely and vital." It is evident that Babbitt's solution of the problem lies in the union of a closely guarded and vaguely defined inspiration with form in its neo-classical sense. But the real reconciliation, as I have tried to show, lies far deeper.

(16) Babbitt himself recognizes Croce's greatness, and speaks of Croce's theory as "one of the most interesting attempts" of its kind. Ibid., p. 223.

half of the nineteenth century to the fact that, "In this age, the consciousness of the distinction between liberty and passion, good and evil, nobility and vileness, fineness and sensuality, between the lofty and the base in man became obscured." And he concludes that Shakespeare "was less subtle, but more profound, less involved, but more complex and more great than they." (17) This sort of criticism surely has nothing to do with the "lower spontaneity;" Croce the critic is far less of a "romanticist" than Babbitt makes him out to be. Again, in speaking of Dante, Croce tells us that the unifying element in the Divina Commedia is "un sentimento del mondo, fondato sopra una ferma fede e un sicuro giudizio, e animato da una robusta volonta." (18) And he says further that "I dissidi e contrasti, che noi possiamo scoprire nei suoi concetti e nei suoi atteggiamenti, sono nel profondo delle cose stesse." (19)

(17) Benedetto Croce, Ariosto, Shakespeare, and Corneille, New York, Henry Holt & Co., 1920, p. 334.

(18) Benedetto Croce, La Poesia di Dante, Bari, Laterza & Figli, 1921, p. 161.

(19) Ibid., p. 162.

This is certainly a criticism of the poem in terms of wisdom. Even Croce when he comes to the actual work of criticism finds that he cannot get along without wisdom, that the "history of the human spirit" is not a sufficient and satisfying guide. (20)

What then is this wisdom, in the light of which we are to shape our final judgment as to the greatness of a poem? This final judgment of ours is important, since when once we have made it we shall have finished with what I should call the Primary Criticism of a poem. If we have decided that the poem gives evidence of an intuitus, and if we now decide that that intuitus is in harmony with and proceeds from wisdom, the main task of criticism is over. Any further study of the technique or niceties or problems of the poem will only intensify or modify this, our final decision. Such study I should call

(20) In the very passage which we have quoted above Croce relapses again into his idealistic Hegelian theorizing and tells us: "Ora il vero è che tutti i grandi sono maestri di vita, ma nessuno può esser tale da solo, perché ciascuno di essi è un momento della storia, e la vera maestra è la storia tutta, e non solo quella che noi di continuo recreiamo, ma anche, e soprattutto, quella che noi, in ogni istante, creiamo,"
Ibid., p. 166.

Secondary Criticism.

It is, then, a thing of prime importance that we should well understand what is meant by wisdom. At first sight it would seem a rather vague word and not at all likely to furnish us with an objective standard of value. But wisdom is in fact a very definite and understandable thing, as unchanging as the eternal laws of truth which it embodies.

That there are laws of truth "eternal in the heavens," laws shadowed forth to us in the harmony of an ordered universe, laws that properly fall under the province of wisdom, it is impossible to deny. (21)

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- (21) Cornelius a Lapide, Commentaria in
Scripturam Sacram, Paris is, Ludovicus
Vives, MDCCCLXVI, Tomus Nonus, p. 1
"Encomium Sapientiae,"

"Summus ille rerum Orifex ab ipsis
macrocosmi incunabulis, creatae cuique
naturae suam statim regulam, normam ac
legem associavit, qua quaelibet suis
inclusa terminis, illis constantissime
se contineret, motibus sibi propriis
perpetua serie crearetur, ac nullis
ceteris sibi congruis statu ac perenni
ratione pervinceretur; nimirum, ut universum
hoc archetypum, unde ab auctore suo
expressus est, qua universum, licet sciatica
duntaxat imitatione, tenuis aestigio,
referat tamen, pulcherque hic cosmos specu-
lum nobis sit, cui aeterni illius et
increati mundi pulc ritudinem quoadtenus
intueamur, vel certe solerti mentis
indagine conjectando aestimemus."

Or if there be those who deny this, we cannot allow for their view of things. We are dealing with an intellectual conviction, and, to quote Coleridge once more, "every man does and must expect and demand the universal acquiescence of all intelligent beings in every conviction of his understanding." To refuse to admit an order and purpose, a divine harmony in the world, is to give oneself over to intellectual and artistic chaos. To deny the possibility of man's attaining to some knowledge of the law and purpose which rule the courses of the stars and the motions of his own heart, is to destroy the very possibility of critical opinions about beauty. For that is to deny man any part of wisdom, any power of ordering or of recognizing order; but beauty, as we have said is pax et concordia and "pacificatio pertinet ad effectum ordinationis sapientiae, quia omnis ordinans pacem intendit." (22) It is clear how the classical love of order, and love of peace,

(22) S. Thomas, Commentaria in Lib. III Sent., Dist. XXXV, q. II, Art. II, ad fin.

and love of law, all go hand in hand, and how they all depend on the classical love of wisdom.

Hence, too, flows the reverence of classicists for tradition and the "wisdom of our ages."

Wisdom itself, then, the science of peace and order, Aristotle defines as the knowledge of things τῶν πρώτων ἀρχῶν καὶ ἀιτιῶν θεωρητικόν. (23) Further, he says that its proper possession is a prerogative of divinity. In this, we may believe, he was following the opinion of Plato. Man, however, according to both philosophers, has some share in this divine knowledge, and wisdom is the most precious of man's possessions. The more exalted language the scriptures speak of wisdom as the prerogative of God:

"Dominus possedit me in initio viarum
suarum, antequam quidquam faceret
a principio. ab aeterno ordinata sum,
et ex antiquis, antequam terra fieret." (24)

(23) Metaphysics, (excerpt), I, 2, 1026, 2.

(24) Prov. VIII, 22.

"Ego ex ore Altissimi prodivi, primogenita
ante omnem creaturam, Ego feci in coelis
ut oriretur lumen indeficiens, et sicut
nebula texi omnem terram. Ego in altissimis
habitavi, et thronus meus in columna nubis." (25)

Wisdom in its highest and most spiritual manifestations is, the theologians tell us, a special supernatural gift. That such a gift should be shared by one not elevated to the supernatural order, is not, strictly speaking, possible. But the great philosophers and poets of the non-Christian dispensation went so far along the path of wisdom that the pagans themselves believed that their knowledge came from above, and we may well wonder whether the greatest of them did not receive some sort of special supernatural gift. (26)

(25) Eccl. XXVI.

(26) cf. E.I. Watkin, Bow in the Clouds, London, Sheed and Ward, 1931, p. 68 n.
"It will be seen that I admit the supernatural character of the mystical experience of the non-Christian philosophers. Its possibility is cogently argued by Père Marechal, S.J."
Just how much of strictly supernatural inspiration we may admit among the peoples of pagan antiquity is a delicate question. But I would suggest that however much we may vindicate for the ancient metaphysicians, that much we will have to concede to the poets. And I would suggest further that as regards Plato, whom Watkin mentions and whom, I suppose, everyone would cite as an instance of an inspired philosopher, we may well doubt whether it was not to Plato qua poet and not qua philosopher that the gift of wisdom was granted. cf. Chap. 2 ad finem.

However that may be, the great literary critics have always recognized in great poetry that deeper knowledge of the world and man which is the prerogative of wisdom. But for some inscrutable reason they have not dared, most of them, to use the word, but have contented themselves with ascribing that knowledge to the "rational" intellect. At times, however, this explanation fails them; reason has often proved to be incompatible with poetic inspiration. Yet even at such times the critics have not had recourse to wisdom, but have taken refuge in vaguely beautiful descriptions of the poet's "interest in life."

Thus Arnold has this to say:

"In poetry, as a criticism of life, under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his views of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignity; but it has not this high seriousness. Homer's criticism of life has it, Dante's has it, Shakespeare's has it. It is this chiefly which gives to our spirits what they can rest on; and with the increasing demands of our modern ages upon poetry, this virtue of giving us what we can rest upon will be

more and more highly esteemed." (27)

And Mackail says of Sophocles:

"The endless wonderfulness of life -- its splendour and fascination and unfathomable depth of meaning; this is what Sophocles gives us. It is neither ethics nor theology; it is something which if we can but realise it, is larger and deeper. Creeds change; systems pass; this remains. Sophocles does not affect to explain life; he hardly criticises it Morals and religion are to him neither the foundations nor the superstructure; they are elements or functions of the amazing and incomprehensible thing, the one thing that matters, the one thing that is, -- life." (28)

To give one more instance of this appeal from wisdom to "life" we cite the following from Croce:

(27) Matthew Arnold, "Essays in Criticism" (sec. series) Caravan Lib. Macmillan, 1930, p. 4, p. 23.

Poor Arnold! It seems evident that he is merely whistling to keep up his courage. As T.S. Eliot remarks:

"He had no real serenity, only an impeccable demeanour. Perhaps he cared too much for civilization, forgetting that Heaven and Earth shall pass away, and Mr. Arnold with them, and there is only one stay." op.cit., p. 119.

(28) J.W. Mackail, Lectures on Greek Poetry, pp. 155-156.

"The sense of life is also extolled in his (Shakespeare's) work, which for that reason is held to be eminently dramatic that is to say, animated with a sense of life considered in itself, in its eternal discord, its eternal harshness, its bitter-sweet, in all its complexity." (29)

But what is this "life" of which the critics speak so eloquently? Surely it is the mystery of human existence. And what we really expect of great poetry is something, at least, of that wisdom which sees the solution of that mystery and the workings of the divine plan. We want more than a "sense of life," more than a "criticism" of it in Arnold's sense, more than a portrayal of the "endless wonderfulness of it." We want something of a solution where a solution can be had; in the sublime faith of Antigone, in the Oedipus Coloneus where Oedipus "makes ready his burial amid the portents of the sky," in the *πρὸς τὸν θεόν* of Aeschylus, in the reconciliation of the "Lamiae," in the searching out the ways of God with man. Or if it be

(29) Benedetto Croce, "Ariosto, Shakespeare, and Corneille," p. 333.

half the fascination of Tragedy that man cannot solve completely the problem of evil, at least we demand a belief in a final solution, a final peace. This, wisdom tells us, there must be. And if a poet, like Ibsen, proposes for our contemplation a problem of human life, as in "Ghosts," and implies that there are no depths of mystery even in which the solution lies, then we cannot say that such a poet is not wise, that his vision is not a intuitus SAPIENTIAE, that he is not a great poet. Nor will his seeming intuitions, his vividness, and artistic splendour, change one whit our decision that this is not a great poem. Nor will his "sense of life" or his "criticism" of life, or his portrayal of life mean anything to us in comparison with wisdom. For us he falls short of that "sublimity" of which 'Longinus' says "that all other qualities prove their possessors to be men, but sublimity raises them near the majesty of God." (30) We find in "Ghosts" no evidence of wisdom, no suggestion even that "our thoughts often pass beyond the bounds of space, and that if we survey our life on every side and see

(30) "Longinus," op.cit., XXXVI, 1.

how much more it everywhere abounds in what is striking and great, and beautiful, we shall soon discern the purpose of our birth." (31) By so much for us Ibsen fails of being a great poet; he has not heard, he has not known the words which Wisdom speaks of herself "Attaining it a fine ad finem fortiter, et DISSENT o ia suaviter." (32)

The belief in a final peace and perfection, the firm trust in the calm beauty of wisdom, is so dominant a note in all Greek art that we do well in speaking of the art of Hellenas as the example par excellence of the classical love of wisdom. To the children of Athens it was not always given to pierce the veil of the mystery of human life. They were not always capable of fashioning the supremest beauties that lie hidden in the highest of spiritual visions, But they possessed from the first that love of wisdom, that calm of contemplation, that

(31) Ibid. XLV, 3.

(32) Lib. Sap., cap VIII.

quiet delight in the order and harmony of the universe, which must underlie and inspire all true poetic vision. (33) And when their moments of insight did come, then their visions of beauty stood out all the more splendidly against that quiet back-ground of wisdom, like a statue of Pheidias against the blue of a certain, or like the marble of the Parthenon against the blue of an Attic sky.

It is high time now that we turn our attention to the first great dramatists of that classical world. It is our intention to keep our eyes turned steadily on their poetry, to criticize them in the light of what I have presumed to call the principles of Primary Criticism in poetry. In the course of this study, we shall, of course, have occasion to touch

(33) Perhaps this explains in part the extraordinary Greek love of platitudes. For the rest it is remarkable how a seemingly platitudinous expression in the midst of a great Greek tragedy becomes a thing of beauty and power.

on some of the problems of dramatic technique that arise in the tragedies. We shall have occasion, too, to treat of some of the marvels of language and rhythm which we have hinted at in our third chapter. But these aspects of the tragedians' art have already been treated by others far more competent than ourselves. The merit of the present study, if merit it have, will be due to the novelty of our approach rather than to the keenness of our analysis or any other critical qualifications.

on some of the problems of dramatic technique that arise in the tragedies. We shall also have occasion to treat of a few of the marvels of language and rhythm which we have hinted at in our third chapter. But these aspects of the tragedians' art have been studied frequently by others. The merit of the present thesis will lie rather in novelty of approach than in keenness of analysis or other critical excellences.

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